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circulation.)*

THE BARRIER.

A NEW AND ORIGINAL PLAY,
IN FOUR ACTS,

BY

ALFRED SUTRO.

LONDON:

PRINTED AT THE CHISWICK PRESS

1907.

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Wendell Trench.

CHARACTERS.

THE DUKE OF ST. EDMUNDS.
THE MARQUIS OF STUDLAND, M.P.
LORD ROLAND DUMARAY.
CAPTAIN ANTONY ERQUEN.
MR. HANKS.
EUSTACE MARILLIER.
MARGARET VERRALL.
LADY STUDLAND.
LADY ALMA DUMARAY.
MRS. PETHICK.
WILSON.

The action of the play passes in two days.

THE BARRIER.

ACT I.

The drawing-room of MARGARET VERRALL'S house in Regent's Park. It is a room of modest size, well-lined with bookshelves, hung with good pictures, the furniture artistic and pleasant—a room that is cosy and comfortable, exceedingly unpretentious, and arguing the possession, in its owner, of refined and cultured instincts. In a corner is a piano; on the one or two small tables are books and magazines. A bowl of flowers is on the piano. From the windows is a pleasant view on to the park. At left is a door leading to an inner room; at back another, opening on to a landing and staircase.

MRS. PETHICK, a gray-haired lady, whose face habitually wears a somewhat sour and discontented expression, is seated at a table, knitting. The door at back bursts open, and WILSON rushes into the room, flourishing a poster.

Wilson. [*Excitedly.*] Mum! Mum!

Mrs. Pethick. What is it, Wilson?

Wilson. Got it from the paper-boy, m'm. Look!

[*She flourishes the poster, on which is inscribed in large letters, "MARGARET VERRALL THROWS UP HER PART AT THE ORPHEON."*]

Mrs. Pethick. [*Putting up her glasses, reading.*] "Margaret Verrall throws up her part at the Orpheon." Well!

Wilson. A poster all to herself, m'm, like as if she was a Distressing Incident, or a Earthquake!

Mrs. Pethick. [Grumbling.] What are we coming to! [*Tony comes in with hat and stick.*] Ah, Captain——

Wilson. Have you seen this, sir?

Tony. [Laughing, as he puts down his hat and stick.] Yes, I've seen it! And the newsboys are making a fortune! [*Wilson goes, back.*] Good afternoon, Mrs. Pethick.

Mrs. Pethick. [Sourly.] Afternoon. What next, I wonder! What is it they say?

Tony. Merely that she has thrown up her part. Also that she refuses to be interviewed.

Mrs. Pethick. Interviewed! I've had to disconnect the telephone. And there has been a constant stream of reporters all the morning.

Tony. [Sitting.] The stage is very popular.

Mrs. Pethick. [Knitting savagely.] More excitement over an actress going out of a bill——

Tony. Than over a rich man entering the Kingdom of Heaven. Yes.

Mrs. Pethick. [Stopping her knitting for a moment and looking severely at him.] Captain Erquen, I must beg you not to bring sacred matters into contempt.

Tony. [Meekly.] I apologize, Mrs. Pethick. But so many rich men have died lately—one wonders.

Mrs. Pethick. [Knitting again.] There won't be any of them in Heaven—and there won't be any actresses either.

Tony. That's rather severe, Mrs. Pethick—but, of course, if you've made up your mind——Where is Margaret?

Mrs. Pethick. Resting. Or writing. Or feeding her canaries. Or sulking. We had words.

Tony. Oh, I'm sorry.

Mrs. Pethick. [Viciously.] I'm her companion, and chaperone, and receive a hundred pounds a year——

Tony. [Meekly.] I know, Mrs. Pethick.

Mrs. Pethick. But that's no reason why I should be muzzled, and sat on, and jumped on——

Tony. The doctor ordered her exercise. But she'd really better try golf.

Mrs. Pethick. [Angrily.] Don't, Captain Erquen! I don't

like it—I'm not in the mood for it! And this frivolity is altogether out of place, in the presence of a crisis!

Tony. [*Nursing his knee.*] A big word, Mrs. Pethick—but not quite justified—is it? It's scarcely a crisis when a lady becomes engaged.

Mrs. Pethick. [*Snorting.*] A lady! An actress!

Tony. [*Cheerfully.*] And a very fine one, by Jove! She has conquered this funny old city—and the poster's the proof of it!

Mrs. Pethick. Bah! They'd put me on a poster if I murdered the cook!

Tony. I trust your ambition will not carry you those lengths, Mrs. Pethick. But I say again, why crisis? Margaret's engaged——

Mrs. Pethick. To the son of a Duke! When the papers know that!——

Tony. They'll be simply delirious—ecstatic, epithalamic—wild and bubbling over!—Pity he's not the eldest son.

Mrs. Pethick. You are amazing!

[*She lays down her knitting, and stares at him over her glasses.*]

Tony. Really? Why?

Mrs. Pethick. Aren't you in love with her yourself?

Tony. We're all in love with her, Mrs. Pethick.

Mrs. Pethick. [*Sourly.*] I'm not! And I'd much rather she married you!

Tony. That's very good of you. Why this preference?

Mrs. Pethick. He's such a nice boy!

Tony. She's such a nice girl.

Mrs. Pethick. [*Knitting rapidly.*] Only known her six weeks!

Tony. Long enough to go round the world—and it's not so far to a woman's heart.

Mrs. Pethick. [*Snapping her needles.*] A woman's heart—twaddle! Besides, she's years older!

Tony. [*Indignantly.*] She's not!

Mrs. Pethick. Ever seen her birth certificate?

Tony. [*Shaking a finger at her.*] Spiteful! And wrong, too. I've never known Margaret tell a lie. Nor have you, either.

Mrs. Pethick. [Knitting more violently than ever.] Oh, you make me tired, with your Margaret!

[MARGARET enters from L., holding a cage with a canary in it, that she puts on the table. She pats TONY'S arm as she passes, and bends merrily over MRS. PETHICK.]

Margaret. Does he make you tired, Mother Pethick?

Mrs. Pethick. [Crossly.] Don't call me Mother Pethick! I won't have it! I've told you that lots of times. I won't have it!

Margaret. [Merrily.] Isn't she cross, Tony? Instead of being overjoyed! Don't go, old lady. Sit down.

[She presses MRS. PETHICK, who has made as though about to rise, back into her chair.]

Mrs. Pethick. [Sourly.] Old lady! Listen to her—such manners! And why have you brought that nasty bird in here?

Margaret. He wanted a change of air, he told me—and to see his godmother—that's you, dear porcupine. *[She kisses MRS. PETHICK, who wriggles under the caress.]* O Tony, she has been so rude to me!

Tony. And to me.

Margaret. Such a wicked old tongue she has! Always dissatisfied—and predicting unpleasant things!

Mrs. Pethick. Never mind—you'll soon be rid of me now—Lady Margaret!

Margaret. No—Lady Roland, my dear. And it sounds nice—awful nice! But I shall always stick to my dear old frump!

Mrs. Pethick. [Indignantly.] Margaret!

Margaret. [Dancing round her.]

I love her, I love her, and who shall dare

To chide me for loving—my grumpy old bear!

Mrs. Pethick. [Rising, with dignity.] Permit me to leave you.

Margaret. Not now. Sit down. Business. Let us be serious. You too, Tony. About this throwing up the part.

Tony. Yes?

Margaret. I couldn't tell them at the theatre about Roland,

of course—and I *was* so anxious to be free—till we're married, at any rate—and—*such* a stroke of luck! I had a difference with the author—about some lines he wanted me to speak, and I wouldn't. He was stubborn, I firm—result, I simply left. Manager tearing his hair, offering to fricassee the author, stew him, roast him or boil him—swearing I was worth more to him than a million authors—I refused, and retired—with dignity. And there we are!

Mrs. Pethick. There we are! A nice state of things! A whole theatre upset by a mere—galvanized doll!

Margaret. [*Chuckling.*] There, Tony—that's how she talks to me! But I want *you* to do the rest, will you?

Tony. Of course. I'll go down, and see Forrester.

Margaret. Ascribe it to nerves—caprice—anything. I want to be out of the bill for a bit.

Mrs. Pethick. [*Grimly.*] And your salary?

Margaret. That'll be out of the bill, too. We've lots of money.

Mrs. Pethick. No, we haven't! You're so extravagant! Always sending cheques to ridiculous charities! Frauds they are, all of 'em, I know!

Margaret. We've enough to keep the pot boiling, for the present, at any rate. And I can't be at the theatre now—Roland told his people this morning——

Mrs. Pethick. Poor things! My heart bleeds for them!

Margaret. [*Merrily.*] Put on some sticking-plaister, frumpy dear—you've no blood to lose! But I'm sure they'll appreciate my leaving the stage for the moment. Don't you agree, Tony?

Tony. Yes, I do. I think you're right.

Mrs. Pethick. [*With derision.*] *He* thinks you're right! She asks the man who loves her whether she's right in marrying someone else!

Margaret. Now just you go away, you bundle of perverse sentimentality, and leave me to talk with—the man who loves me!

Mrs. Pethick. [*Gathering up her belongings.*] I go. You're dining at home?

Margaret. Of course.

Mrs. Pethick. Then at least let me request you, when we meet at dinner, to respect the laws of common civility.

[*She goes, i. e., TONY holds open the door for her, then returns. MARGARET has gone to the table on which the cage stands, and is playing with the bird; she has her back to TONY.*]

Margaret. [*Softly.*] Do you still love me, Tony?

Tony. Not impossible. Habit I've got into. Like smoking cigarettes. Not worth talking about.

Margaret. [*Turning and facing him.*] Curious man!

Tony. Lots like me, in the army. Men of one idea. I've proposed to you, with military regularity, every six months.

Margaret. [*Pained.*] Don't, Tony!

Tony. Next proposal was just about due, when up popped Roland. But, very seriously, Maggie, there isn't a grain of feeling in me that isn't one large wish for your happiness.

Margaret. [*Earnestly.*] I'm sure of that. You've been a dear friend to me. And you'll remain so, won't you?

Tony. Always—but not quite so near a one. I'm going away.

Margaret. Where? For long?

Tony. India. I've been offered a very fine berth—on a railway. Great stroke of luck. Only heard of it this morning, and accepted right away.

Margaret. I'm glad—and I'm sorry——

Tony. I'm off next Friday.

Margaret. So soon?

Tony. The man whose place I'm taking died suddenly of enteric—must sail at once. But you won't miss me.

Margaret. I shall, awfully.

Tony. Roland will be there.

Margaret. O Tony, he *is* a dear boy, isn't he?

Tony. A good fellow—and a gentleman—which is more than can be said of all duke's sons. Oh yes, I like him—as well as can be expected—under the circumstances.

Margaret. So you don't think me so very foolish?

Tony. Foolish—why? We'll leave all that cackle about difference of station to newspaper writers and disappointed old maids

Margaret. But the family?

Tony. They'll try to prevent it, because that's the usual thing, and dukes *always* do the usual thing——

Margaret. I suppose so.

Tony. But your name stands as high as that of any woman in London—and you and Roland will get married, whether the Duke likes it or not—and then they'll come round.

Margaret. I wonder!

Tony. Sure to! They've only to see you! Now let's discuss this theatre business. There's the question, of course, of the contract.

[*WILSON enters hurriedly, with a card on a salver.*

Margaret. [*Very annoyed, waving her away.*] Wilson, I told you I would see no one!

Wilson. [*Very excitedly.*] If you please, m'm——

Margaret. No one, I said—no one at all! Tell him so!

Wilson. [*Trying to get in a word.*] M'm——

Margaret. At once, do you hear?

Wilson. [*Gasping.*] The Duke!

Margaret. } The Duke???

Tony. }

Wilson. Yes, m'm, if you please, m'm.

[*She presents the salver.*

Margaret. [*Taking the card.*] The Duke of St. Edmunds! The Duke here! Tony!

Wilson. Such a nice gentleman, m'm! Not at all what you'd think a——

Tony. You must see him, of course.

Wilson. Most affable, m'm! So polite and——

Margaret. Heaven, I must do my hair! Tony, talk to him while I——Ask him to come up, Wilson. His——

[*She pauses and looks interrogatively at TONY.*

Tony. [*With a chuckle.*] His Grace.

Margaret. Fancy! [*To WILSON.*] Go! [*WILSON goes.*] I'll fly. Oh! [*She rushes to the book-shelves, and feverishly picks out books.*] Ibsen, Tolstoy, Nietzsche. Scatter these, Tony. They'll show him that I—I shan't be long.

[*She rushes out.* TONY, with a smile, puts the books on the table. WILSON comes in with the DUKE.

Wilson. [*Pompously.*] His Grace the Duke of St. Edmunds.

[*She goes.*

Tony. Good afternoon. Won't you sit down? Miss Verrall will be here in a moment. She asked me——

Duke. Thank you. [*He sits.*

Tony. Let me introduce myself. I am Antony Erquen, late Captain in His Majesty's Border Rifles—and a very old friend of Miss Verrall's.

Duke. Ah. You are young to have left the Army.

Tony. After fifteen years' service a fellow gets tired of inspecting his men's clothes, and boots, and counting the beery coppers they've taken in the canteen——

Duke. Not very edifying, certainly.

Tony. So I sent in my papers, and became a private citizen again. But I have still not lost the habit of criticising men's clothing.

Duke. Ah. Nothing very wrong, I trust, with mine?

Tony. [*With a smile.*] You seem to have the proper number of buttons, Duke, and I imagine your boots fit you. But, seriously, isn't it an absurd thing that a highly trained officer should have to concern himself with these trifles?

Duke. I am a fairly old man, Captain Erquen, and have lived so long among absurd things that I have grown used to them. [*He fingers the books on the table.*] Ibsen, Tolstoy, Nietzsche! Dear me! Does Miss Verrall read these?

Tony. Oh yes.

Duke. You increase my apprehension. My mission was already sufficiently embarrassing! I will confess to you, Captain, that I know these gentlemen only by reputation. Now that [*he nods at the canary*] is very much more in my line.

Tony. The canary?

Duke. [*Rising, and going to the cage.*] If I mistake not, a very good Lancashire turn-crown. Yes—it is. The crest overlaps the eyes a *leetle* too much—and I'm afraid the feathers are somewhat inclined to curl. But it's a fine bird. [*He turns.*] Pardon me, Captain. I am exceedingly fond of birds and flowers.

Tony. So is Miss Verrall.

Duke. [*Returning to his seat.*] Thank Heaven! We shall have *some* common ground. Tell me, Captain—for I am a very shy man—is Miss Verrall—alarming?

Tony. [*Puzzled.*] Alarming?

Duke. I have never seen her, you know. A person, myself, without any very pronounced or fixed prejudices, I am allied, by marriage, to the very pillar and prop of Nonconformity. He has a dread of the theatre.

Tony. He?

Duke. I am alluding to the father of my daughter-in-law—my elder son's wife. You have heard of Mr. Hanks?

Tony. [*Shaking his head.*] I'm afraid that I——

Duke. Surely you know Bollings and Hanks, the great drapers in the Seven Sisters' Road? [*TONY nods.*] Ah, of course. It is curious, Captain—these are the days of the great brewers, and great drapers, and great financiers—there *were* days of great statesmen, great warriors, and even of great dukes. But let that pass. Tell me about Miss Verrall.

Tony. This to begin with. She is the sweetest, noblest, truest creature——

Duke. That will do very well to begin with. Pray go on.

Tony. You are laughing at me, but my emphasis is not as out of place as you think. So many people are apt to imagine that because a woman is connected with the stage——

Duke. [*Breaking in gently.*] I quite agree, my dear Captain. And I am fully prepared to endorse all you say. My son has already emptied the adjective-box; I am glad to have your superlatives also. Will you tell me if Miss Verrall——

[*MARGARET comes in. TONY and the DUKE rise.*]

Tony. Here she is! Duke, let me introduce you to Miss Margaret Verrall—the Duke of St. Edmunds. And now I'll leave you.

Margaret. [*After an exchange of formal bows with the DUKE.*] You'll come back, Tony? I'd like to——

Tony. I'll wait downstairs. [*To the DUKE.*] Good-bye.

Duke. Good-bye, Captain. I trust we may meet again.

Tony. With all my heart! [*He goes.*]

Margaret. Won't you sit down? And, first of all, tell me, please, must I punctuate every sentence with "Your Grace"? I've never spoken to a real live duke before.

Duke. My dear Miss Verrall, *your* grace is greater than mine. And if any extra punctuation be needed, you have but to flash a smile on me. In the impossible event of my attention wandering, you may recall me to sanity by addressing me sharply as "duke."

Margaret. [*Gaily.*] Ah, very well—that is delightfully simple! [*She sits.*] And—now?

Duke. [*Ruefully, as he sits, facing her*] Now! That's just it! Miss Verrall, I have a difficult task before me—I may say, in many respects, an odious task. It will simplify matters very considerably if you will allow me to offer, as preface, a little autobiographical sketch.

Margaret. [*Smiling.*] By all means.

Duke. Thank you. Miss Verrall, you behold before you what is probably the most tragical figure in modern life—tragic, I assure you, don't laugh—a poor duke.

Margaret. Oh!

Duke. The word "poor" has been somewhat corrupted from its original sense—the sense in which I use it. I have no money. [*MARGARET bows smilingly.*] Nor is this my fault, Miss Verrall. My father, the kindest and most genial of men, absent-mindedly scattered the last fragments of a fortune into which *his* father, before him, had dipped very heavily. I married when I was very young: when my father died I found myself practically without a shilling.

Margaret. [*Politely.*] I'm sorry.

Duke. In the course of your pleasant excursion through life, Miss Verrall, you may have come across a thing called a mortgage. That thing has been a nightmare to me since I inherited the estates. I will not harrow you with details—but if you want to conceive my position, imagine a suit of clothes—with another man inside them! My wife, who was a practical woman, realized that my elder son must marry money. He did—she arranged it—and then she died, and left me to face the consequences.

Margaret. Were they so very dreadful?

Duke. My son married the daughter of Bollings and Hanks—I mean Mr. Hanks——

Margaret. Seven Sisters' Road?

Duke. [*With a smile.*] And elsewhere! To be brief, agricultural depression had, in the meantime, so considerably reduced the value of my estates that I was unable to pay the interest on the mortgages, nor were these worth the money advanced. Mr. Hanks, who is fabulously wealthy—a kind of fairy draper—intervened. Mr. Hanks took over the mortgages, and it is he who manages the property. Mr. Hanks receives all the money that comes in, and pays all the money that goes out. I, my dear Miss Verrall, am simply a figure-head; nominally master and owner of Dumaray Castle, Stormbrook Priory, and the rest—really a pauper who finds it the most difficult thing in the world to pay his tailor's bill and the subscription at his club.

Margaret. How awful!

Duke. The fact is that it isn't pleasant—but one has to make the best of things, and I do. I at least derive this benefit from the arrangement, that I am enabled to retain my old servants—even to pension them when they are past work—for Mr. Hanks is very just and very generous—and to maintain, though in a somewhat shaky fashion, the traditions of my ancient house. . . . There you have, Miss Verrall, very simply, the story of my life. It has, I venture to say, been a life of sufficient correctness—I have none of the vices with which popular fiction and popular preachers are wont to credit my order——

Margaret. And mine.

Duke. [*Bowing.*] And yours. To be popular one has to punch hard—and we have both been punched. It doesn't hurt! Well, to continue. My elder son, as I have said, was married, six years ago, to Mr. Hanks's daughter, Alicia Gwendolen—a masterful lady, who has sent her husband into the House—where I imagine that in silence and resignation, he accomplishes such duties as are required of him. For we are not a brilliant family, Miss Verrall.

Margaret. [*Merrily.*] You mustn't say that!

Duke. [*Shaking his head.*] The family brain, I fear, has

gone the way of the family estates, and has sadly—deteriorated! But that by the way! My own daughter—poor child!—has allowed Alicia Gwendolen to engage her to a wealthy South African magnate—and it was the intention, the long-thought-out, carefully-matured intention of the aforesaid Alicia Gwendolen to marry Roland to an American girl, whose father has made what is known as a pile in—pork.

Margaret. Miss Hilling. I know.

Duke. Imagine, therefore, the consternation into which his announcement of this morning has thrown the ruling powers! For you will, I am sure, have gathered from what I have said that Alicia Gwendolen is the sun, the rising and setting sun, around which I, the meekest of mortals, pathetically revolve!

Margaret. [*Laughing.*] Strawberry-leaves and all!

Duke. All! Her father whirls with me in the starry sphere, accompanied by her husband, my daughter, and, till to-day, Roland! For with us, I assure you, the law of gravitation is suspended—and we are conscious only of one attraction—Alicia Gwendolen—who has annexed our souls, and keeps the keys in the little chatelaine that is strapped to her waist. And the mission with which I am charged, Miss Verrall, is a mission which this superior power has imposed upon me; and the initial repugnance with which I received it is vastly increased now that I have had the privilege of meeting you, face to face.

Margaret. [*Cheerfully.*] Go on, duke—don't be afraid! Your daughter-in-law is horrified at the idea of Roland marrying me?

Duke. Let us say she—objects. Therefore, her father does also. And her husband. For myself, let me assure you that I have an absolutely open mind; nor did it need the testimony of Ibsen and Tolstoy to convince me——

Margaret. [*With a chuckle.*] Never mind them. I put them there myself to make an impression. Go on.

Duke. Mr. Hanks is a worthy man. He has even a sense of humour. But he was early inoculated with Nonconformity—and has it badly. Need I say more?

Margaret. [*Gaily.*] No! And your mission?

Duke. [*Bowing his head.*] You correctly reproach my gar-

rulity. But that mission is so odious that I talk on, and on, to postpone it. •

Margaret. You needn't. I regard you henceforth as an Ambassador—and your remarks are privileged.

Duke. Thank you again. Briefly then—I shut my eyes as I say it—in a word—oh, never was speech so difficult to me!—I have come—Miss Verrall, I hate myself for saying it——

[*He pauses, in deep and very genuine embarrassment.*]

Margaret. The mission, Ambassador!

Duke. I know of course, and in advance, what your answer will be——

Margaret. Then you surely need have no scruple in delivering the message!

Duke. [*With downcast eyes.*] I am instructed—to offer you—five thousand pounds—if you will—break off—the engagement.

Margaret. [*Laughing and clapping her hands.*] Five thousand pounds! Princely! But, duke, surely you were told to try me with less, to begin with!

Duke. [*Smiling.*] That is so. I fancy I may spare you the trouble of declining?

Margaret. Yes. Though I cheerfully agree with what you said before—that Mr. Hanks is generous. I would go further, and call him extravagant! And now, duke—you will cease to be an Ambassador——

Duke. Not yet. It was foreseen—Roland's ecstatic praise of you caused even Alicia to waver—that you might refuse. So there is another proposal—this time an invitation.

Margaret. [*Wondering.*] An invitation?

Duke. No less. The ruling powers migrate to the country to-morrow—to Dumaray Castle—you are bidden join us there, if you will, for a week or so.

Margaret. What !!! This from Mr. Hanks?

Duke. I assure you.

Margaret. And his daughter?

Duke. Especially his daughter.

Margaret. And they never go to the theatre?

Duke. They would as soon venture in a donkey-cart to the North Pole.

Margaret. I confess that I very much prefer this proposition to the other.

Duke. [*Awkwardly.*] There is a—clause, Miss Verrall, a—codicil, a—trifling—stipulation——

Margaret. Which is?

Duke. That you come—merely as an ordinary acquaintance—and not as Roland's—*fiancée*——

Margaret. [*Thoughtfully.*] Ah! But still—even then—the offer is kind—I hadn't expected——Oh, duke! Light bursts in upon me, I see, I understand!

Duke. What?

Margaret. [*Bubbling over with glee.*] Your daughter-in-law is convinced that if Roland saw me for a week with *real* ladies, he would very quickly detect the difference—and be so shocked and disgusted that he would be only too anxious—to break off the engagement himself!

[*She and the Duke look at each other; he bursts out laughing in his turn, and for a moment they enjoy the joke together.*]

Duke. [*Rising and going to her.*] My dear Miss Verrall, pray believe that if I accepted this mission, it was only because of my fear that, if I refused, my substitute might acquit himself even more offensively.

Margaret. There is no need of apology, duke—you have been most kind—most kind and considerate. And I am grateful for the invitation—and I shall be glad to go to your house—but only as Roland's affianced wife, and in no other capacity.

Duke. [*Gathering up his belongings, and preparing to go.*] You have all my sympathy, Miss Verrall, and I have no more to say.

Margaret. [*Rising, and facing him.*] Sir, you are the one person I have to consider; your daughter-in-law and her father are nothing to me. It is to *you* that I put the question—do you consent to my marrying your son?

Duke. [*With a mild shrug.*] Of what value is the consent of a penniless father?

Margaret. It is all we require of you, sir.

Duke. Miss Verrall, Roland is in the Guards, and receives a handsome allowance from Mr. Hanks——

Margaret. He means to leave the Army, sir.

Duke. So he told us this morning. He proposes to become an engineer, and work. Why not? I have never tried to enforce my will upon him—I shall not now.

Margaret. Then you do *not* approve?

Duke. If I *have* an objection, it is mainly on the score of finance. Roland hasn't a penny. He would be living on his wife.

Margaret. Is it so very much more honourable, duke, to live on his wife's father?

Duke. No—but it has the warrant of convention, and safeguards the man's self-respect.

Margaret. Will that self-respect be so much better preserved if he sells himself to the pig-gentleman's daughter?

Duke. Dear Miss Verrall, we live in a world which admits logic only in text-books that nobody reads.

Margaret. Roland loves me.

Duke. He adores you: and you have only to lift your little finger, and not all the Hankses and Bollingses in *Seventy Sisters' Roads* will keep him from marrying you. And I, who have seen you, and recognize your charm, I do not intend to try. Can I say more?

Margaret. [*Coldly.*] I thank you.

Duke. Not very cordially!

Margaret. You do what you think right.

Duke. And you also will do what you think right—and whatever you do will, I'm sure, be well done. As for me, I am passive—I have been passive so long, forced into inaction—that I have no more volition than an oyster—which is not even offered the choice of lemon or vinegar at the crisis of its existence.

Margaret. [*Earnestly.*] Duke, duke, don't joke about it—say you consent!

Duke. Dear Miss Verrall, Roland told us this morning that you and he intended to get married, whether we consented or not.

Margaret. Now that I have seen you——

Duke. [*Interrupting her gently and taking her by the hand.*]

You at least have the assurance that I shall not interfere, or oppose.

Margaret. [*Merrily.*] I warn you, duke, that I shall regard that as consent!

Duke. To return to my oyster, that's what the man says, as he swallows it!

Margaret. I offer you neither lemon nor vinegar—but a daughter-in-law who shall make you proud of your son—and of her, too!

Duke. [*Pressing her hand that he still holds in his.*] Of that I have not the least doubt. You will not come to Dumaray?

Margaret. Sir, Dumaray has come—to me.

Duke. [*Acknowledging the compliment with a slight bow, and releasing her hand.*] I need scarcely tell you that you would be received there as befits you. Figure-head though I be, you may rest assured of that. But you know best. Should you, however, alter your mind——

[*ROLAND rushes in.*]

Roland. [*Breathless, looking from one to the other.*] Father—Margaret—well? Father, now you've seen her! Isn't she——

Margaret. [*Laying a hand on his arm.*] Hush, Roland! Your father has been most kind.

Duke. My boy, Miss Verrall and I have had a delightful talk.

Roland. [*Turning to him.*] Don't call her Miss Verrall, guv'nor—dear old guv'nor——

Duke. Roland, I have been compelled to take the family skeleton out of its cupboard.

Roland. Alicia Gwendolen!

Duke. [*With a warning forefinger.*] Hush—let us not speak disrespectfully of a most well-meaning lady—and your sister-in-law. I was alluding to my poverty. I have informed Miss Verrall that I am absolutely without means, and unable to offer you any allowance.

Roland. That makes no difference—does it, Margaret?

Margaret. None, absolutely none. Your father knows.

Duke. I leave you with Miss Verrall, my boy. I have been forced to play an odious part to-day. Next time I come I shall, I hope, represent only myself.

[*He holds out his hand to MARGARET.*]

Margaret. Come again soon, duke, and advise us!

Duke. Discuss with Roland the proposed visit to Dumaray.

Roland. What! They've asked her down there!

Duke. Yes, Miss Verrall will tell you. [*To MARGARET.*] If you alter your mind—I am going to my club—Roland will know where to find me.

Margaret. I shall not alter my mind, duke.

Duke. So be it. And be sure that you have a friend in me, now and always. Good-bye. Stay here, I beg—nay, I insist. Au revoir. [*He goes.*]

Roland. [*Eagerly.*] Maggie, tell me—why not go to Dumaray? And I say, *isn't* he a dear old boy?

Margaret. He's adorable! But I want *you* to tell me first—to tell me again and again—that you love me.

Roland. That I love you! [*He throws his arms round her and kisses her fondly.*] Maggie, don't you know that! Love you, love you!

Margaret. [*Caressing his cheek.*] Love! Oh, the little word that says so little and means so much! Love, love—oh, the happiness of it! I have mocked it so often on the stage—mocked and pretended—and now! . . . Dearest, dearest, no one shall take you from me!

Roland. [*Stoutly.*] I should like to see 'em try, that's all! I told Alicia——

Margaret. She hates me, of course, she and her father. An actress—horrible! A *mésalliance*, if you marry me—but the daughter of the man who has sold a great many pigs——

Roland. [*With a guffaw.*] You should see her! By Jove, you should see her!

Margaret. I know—I can guess. We may be foolish, of course——

Roland. Why? What's there foolish about it? It's the life I'm leading is foolish. I never wanted to go into the Army.

Margaret. [*Her head on his shoulder.*] Think of it—here we are in this room, we two, with our love—and what more do we want—what more!

Roland. By Jove, that's what I told them—I said so. They

yarned and talked rot. I said just what you said—only not quite so well, you know.

Margaret. Mr. Hanks—Mr. Hanks and Alicia—they hate me. Well, we don't need them, do we? What do we care?

Roland. We don't care a tinker's curse—or a row of buttons—or shops!

Margaret. [*Stroking his cheek.*] Dear Roland!

Roland. I'm not much of a talker—I haven't the gift of the gab, like the gov'nor—and they tell me I'm just a young fool, like other young fools—well, if there *are* other fools like me, God bless 'em, I say, because they're the happy ones, as I am, and I never knew what real happiness meant before you told me you loved me.

Margaret. [*Murmuring.*] Dear Roland, dear Roland!

Roland. Not much brain, I daresay—well, I haven't, perhaps, except just for mechanics and things—but there's a heart in me, a heart like chaps that are clever—and that heart's all yours, Maggie, every square inch of it—and I can tell you too, though it's not much to brag about, that it's a heart that never has cared for a woman before.

Margaret. That means nothing to them! Mr. Hanks and Alicia would laugh if they heard you, just laugh, and tell you—Oh yes, there'll be difficulties—but we'll overcome them!

Roland. Do that on our head! Maggie, I went round last night—there's an engineer chap that I know—I've had a good talk with him.

Margaret. And what did he say?

Roland. Well, his face rather dropped, don't you know, when I told him—leaving the Army, and that, and wanting a partnership—he bleated some drivel about serving apprenticeship, as though I were a boy! Fact is, of course, when I said I couldn't bring money——

Margaret. Ah!

Roland. But he's willing to look at those drawings of mine—those plans for the motor. There's a lot in it, I'm sure.

Margaret. I'm sure there is, dear. But you mustn't be discouraged if, just at the start——

Roland. Discouraged? Not I! Besides, there's the Stock

Exchange—tons of money to be made there! And the place where a title tells; they think a lot of a lord, those chaps! Don't like it much, stocks and shares; still, if the motor don't go—But I say, Maggie, the papers are full of it—you've thrown up your part?

Margaret. I shan't be in this new play, dear. . . . An opportunity offered—I wanted to be free just now.

Roland. Fine. I'm so glad! And you'll have to give up the stage, you know, as soon as my motor goes, or something. The gov'nor's awfully taken with you—I could see that. And I'm sure that—I say, why not run down to Dumaray, Maggie?

Margaret. I wasn't to go there as your intended wife, Roland—just as a friend.

Roland. [*Puzzled.*] A friend?

Margaret. For your sister-in-law to inspect me, that's all—find fault with my grammar, resent my clothes—

Roland. [*Bursting out laughing.*] Oh, ho!

Margaret. That you might find out what a common person I was—

Roland. [*Choking.*] Common—you! By Jove, that's a good one! Alicia Gwendolen! My stars! I wonder the gov'nor—

Margaret. He was merely her mouthpiece—he said what she told him to say, and said it most sweetly.

Roland. Poor old gov'nor! Too meek, you know—much too meek! Had a very hard life, poor gov'nor! The mater bullied the soul out of him, and, after her, Alicia!

Margaret. [*Gently.*] Don't let's speak of her, dear Roland.

Roland. I wish the old man could have seen you—Hanks, I mean. Decent old chap, he is—we're all very fond of him. Worships Alicia, worse luck—only child, and his wife's dead. If you came to Dumaray—

Margaret. Oh, Roland, that's out of the question!

Roland. Of course, of course—though I should have liked it; but I daresay you are right. The gov'nor consents—that's the great thing.

Margaret. [*Hesitatingly.*] He didn't exactly consent—we were to do what we thought best—

Roland. That's as far as he'd go—the gov'nor all over; he'll never say yes or no. But such a dear old chap! And after all he's the only one we need bother about.

Margaret. Of course, we're not concerned with the others. You and I, and your father. Who else?

Roland. [*Nursing his knee.*] I'll have to bring Alma to see you. Poor little Alma!

Margaret. Your sister? Is she angry too?

Roland. Alma? Oh, no—she's delighted! One of us, at least, she said—one of the three, will marry for love! The poor girl! You'll like her, Maggie—she *is* such a darling!

Margaret. I'm sure I shall. But, Roland, you never told me she was engaged?

Roland. Only heard it myself last week, and I'm so angry about it!

Margaret. From what your father says, she's not very fond of the man she's to marry?

Roland. Oh no—she hates him!

Margaret. [*Amazed.*] What!

Roland. But he's very rich, and Alicia——

Margaret. You mean to tell me——How old is your sister?

Roland. She's twenty, that's all. It is a shame, isn't it?

Margaret. [*Indignantly.*] A shame! I didn't know such things happened! And your father allows it?

Roland. The gov'nor? Well, he never interferes, you see—he just sits in his corner. And he has suffered so much, all his life, from having no money, that I really believe he thinks that's the worst thing of all.

Margaret. But if your sister dislikes him so much——

Roland. That's all nonsense, Alicia says—mere girlish nonsense. Poor Alma stood out a long time, but she had to give in at last.

Margaret. Oh!

Roland. You see, she's so weak, poor dear! Just like the gov'nor, she is.

Margaret. It's wicked, it's cruel! You shouldn't have allowed it, Roland.

Roland. I told Marillier pretty straight what I thought——

Margaret. [*Her whole body stiffening in sudden, uncontrollable terror.*] Who? Who? What name did you say?

Roland. Marillier—Eustace Marillier—Eustace Joseph! What a name! [*He turns round and looks at her; she has gained complete control.*] But I say—you know him?

Margaret. A tall man—dark, with black hair? Has he been in South Africa?

Roland. The last ten or twelve years—yes, that's the man. One of the raiders, you know; but *he* didn't go to prison! Making his pile all the time! Funny that *you* should have met him!

Margaret. [*Without a trace of emotion.*] I met him—yes, . . . years ago. . . . Has *he* been told—of our engagement, Roland?

Roland. Not yet—he's in Vienna, on business—won't be back for a couple of days. Not a bad fellow, Marillier—knows a lot about horses.

Margaret. [*Gaily.*] It's a very small world, isn't it? Fancy my coming across Mr. Marillier again! It's such a strange name—that's why I remember it.

Roland. Eustace Joseph Marillier—a mouthful!

Margaret. Marillier—rhymes with sillier—doesn't it?

Roland. [*Eagerly.*] I say, you know—it's fine. We shall have a friend in camp now. And Alicia thinks the world of him!

Margaret. Really! Though he hasn't a title? Do you know, I'm almost sorry now—that I said I wouldn't go to Dumaray!

Roland. Oh, Maggie, do, do! I should be *so* grateful!

Margaret. [*Smiling pleasantly at him.*] You'd like me to so very much, Roland?

Roland. I would—I would, really! You see, there's old Hanks—we're great pals, he and I. And Alicia would sing very small, once they'd seen *you*!

Margaret. If you really wish it, Roland——

Roland. Don't I just! It'd be great!

Margaret. Well, I *will* then. There!

Roland. [*Hugging her.*] You darling!

Margaret. I'll go meekly into the den—Red Riding-Hood Maggie and the wolf Alicia.

Roland. You'll soon stop *her* biting! I *am* so glad!

Margaret. Now I tell you what you'd better do—you know where to find your father?

Roland. He'd be at the Club, he said.

Margaret. Well, Roland—go quickly—find him and tell him——

Roland. [*A little disappointed.*] At once—now?

Margaret. [*Caressing him.*] Yes, dear—you see, I don't want the *others* to know—that I've changed my mind.

Roland. You're right—of course, you're right. I'll go. Pick him up in the road, very likely—he stops at every shop-window.

Margaret. To-morrow will suit me best—your father said they were going down to-day.

Roland. I'll tell him. And I'll come in later, and we'll talk about trains.

Margaret. Do, dear. And give him my love. Go quickly, dear Roland.

Roland. Good-bye. [*He kisses her.*] Awfully sweet of you, Maggie! [*He kisses her again.*] I *am* so glad!

[*He rushes off. She stands for a moment, stunned, in a state of collapse, motionless, supporting herself against a chair. After a moment MRS. PETHICK opens the inner door cautiously, peeps in, then, finding MARGARET alone, comes into the room.*

Mrs. Pethick. Well, your ladyship! Has the Duke given you his blessing? Brought your coronet, wrapped in silver paper? I suppose he's walked off with a bundle of photographs——

Margaret. [*Suddenly turning and gripping her by the wrist.*] Marillier's come back.

Mrs. Pethick. [*Aghast, tottering.*] What!!!

Margaret. [*Wildly.*] Come back, come back! Engaged to *his* sister!

Mrs. Pethick. No! Impossible!

Margaret. Yes, I tell you! Yes!

[*There is silence: MRS. PETHICK lets herself fall on to the sofa: the door at back opens, and TONY comes in.*

Tony. [*Cheerfully.*] Well, Maggie, all serene? What has——

Margaret. [*Staring wildly at him.*] Marillier's come back!

Mrs. Pethick. [*Fiercely, springing up.*] You fool, he doesn't know!

Tony. [*Looking from one to the other.*] Know—what? Why, Maggie—— [*He moves towards her.*]

Mrs. Pethick. [*Eagerly, to MARGARET.*] Don't tell him—don't tell—don't trust him——

Tony. [*Sharply.*] Hold your tongue, Mrs. Pethick. [*He turns to MARGARET.*] Maggie, what is it?

Margaret. What is it? what is it? Ruin!

Tony. [*Trying to take her hand.*] Tell me.

Mrs. Pethick. [*Tugging at her sleeve, the other side of her.*] Don't—now don't be a fool. Captain Erquen, leave us. You see that she——

Tony. I see she's in trouble, and needs me. *Who* has come back, Maggie?

Margaret. [*Slowly.*] The usual story—oh, so stale and hackneyed—so fearfully conventional—what you read of every day! I was alone in the world—a child of seventeen. . . . When I escaped, *she* [*she nods at MRS. PETHICK*] gave me a home.

Mrs. Pethick. [*Almost in a shriek.*] She wanted to kill herself! The poor thing! I tell you——

Margaret. Twelve years ago. I'd forgotten—forgotten, I had, it's a fact! He went to South Africa—passed right away. And now he's come back—is engaged to Roland's sister!

Tony. You're sure it's the man?

Margaret. Sure. Engaged to Roland's sister. Of all the millions of people in the world, engaged to the sister of the one man I love.

Mrs. Pethick. [*Grumbling.*] You shouldn't have told him—you shouldn't have told!

Tony. [*Angrily to MRS. PETHICK.*] Be quiet! [*To MARGARET.*] Maggie, well? What can we do?

Mrs. Pethick. [*With a sneer.*] *We!* You'll help her, won't you!

Margaret. I'm going down there.

Tony. Where?

Margaret. Their place in the country. Marillier doesn't know yet. He won't be back for a couple of days—I must see him before—[*she laughs*—] I had forgotten! I had!

Tony. Marillier—I've heard of him. One of the big South African men?

Margaret. Yes.

Tony. They'd know at his office when he'll be back. I'll try to meet him at the station.

Mrs. Pethick. [*Viciously.*] We don't want you at all—you leave it alone.

Margaret. Be quiet, Lucy! [*She smiles a wan smile at Tony.*] Poor Tony! You're sorry?

Tony. Sorry! The question is now, what had best be done?

Margaret. I'll see him down there——

Tony. Why go? Better leave it to me.

Mrs. Pethick. To you! Likely!

Margaret. I've said that I'd go—I was wrong, perhaps—but I must, and I'll see him. Tony, what will he do?

Tony. I don't know. Why not tell Roland?

Margaret. [*Recoiling.*] Tell Roland! Never!

Tony. Don't you think——

Mrs. Pethick. [*Jeering.*] That's his advice! Good advice! Fine!

Tony. [*Ignoring her.*] I'm sure that the wisest thing——

Margaret. No, no, no—no, Tony, no, you're wrong—not that—anything but that. I'll see Marillier——

Tony. Others will meet him down there before you.

Margaret. [*Taken aback.*] That's true—that's true, of course.

Tony. I'll be at the station and meet him.

Margaret. Oh Tony, you will!

Tony. Yes, I'll manage it somehow.

Mrs. Pethick. [*Eagerly.*] Don't you have *him* in the matter at all. You take my advice.

Margaret. [*Turning to her.*] Lucy, Lucy, don't be so foolish!

Mrs. Pethick. [*Angrily.*] Foolish, am I? You'll see. Doesn't

he want you himself? I can't stand by and see this. [*She stalks to the inner door.*] Let me know when he's gone.

[*She bangs out of the room.*]

Tony. [*Very simply.*] She doesn't understand.

Margaret. [*With deep gratitude, holding out both hands to him.*] Oh, Tony—dear Tony! What will you say to him?

Tony. Marillier will keep his mouth shut. I'll see to that, Maggie.

Margaret. Tony!

Tony. I'll manage to have a word with him before he meets anyone else; and believe me, Marillier won't talk.

Margaret. [*Deeply moved.*] I won't thank you, Tony—I can't!

Tony. Dear Margaret, there is no need.

[*ROLAND rushes in, from back.*]

Roland. Maggie, I met the guv'nor in the street, as I told you I would—hullo, Cap! how are you?—at the dog-shop, the corner of Regent Street—lost his heart to a Belgian pug—and I've brought him back with me, just to arrange things. Shall he come up, Maggie?

Margaret. By all means.

[*ROLAND rushes out.*]

Tony. I'll go. Good-bye, Maggie.

Margaret. Good-bye. . . .

[*They shake hands; he goes. The Curtain falls.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

A secluded spot in the grounds of Dumaray Castle. It is a little corner that is evidently free from the ministrations of the professional gardener; all shut in by trees, the horizon merely peeping through; wild flowers grow there, the grass is long and wild, the hedges untrimmed. A hammock is slung between two old oaks, and this, with a couple of rather rickety garden-chairs, and a tree-stump, represent all the sitting accommodation. It is a gorgeous June morning.

ALMA is swinging lazily in the hammock, watching MARGARET, who has made a dart after a squirrel that has just leapt up a tree.

Margaret. He's escaped! Ho-là, Master Squirrel! He jumped—*how* he jumped! Eh, squirrel, where are you? Come down, we won't hurt you. We're alone, just we two—Alma and Margaret—*awfully* friendly! Squirrel, squirrel! You won't? Think again—don't shake your tail at me! No—he won't come—he merely jibbers!

Alma. [*Laughing, as she swings herself lazily.*] Sing to him, Margaret!

Margaret [*With a half-turn towards her.*] Shall I—what shall I sing?—No—look—see him wink? I won't come, he says—I can't trust you—oh, prudent squirrel! He prefers nuts to ladies!

Souvent femme varie

Bien fol qui s'y fie. . . .

Wrong there, you know, Master Squirrel—there *are* some—yes, I assure you! [*She turns to ALMA.*] Oh, Alma, isn't it

lovely here? And you want *me* to sing, with the skylark up there! Listen to him—just listen! Aren't you happy, Alma?

Alma. [*Quietly.*] You forget that Mr. Marillier's coming.

Margaret. [*Suppressing a cry, with a shiver.*] No, no—I hadn't forgotten—oh no! But why think of anything except just now? Yesterday never was, and there'll be no to-morrow—there's only now. And the sun's shining, and the birds are singing, and squirrel's up there, eating nuts.

God's in His Heaven,
All's right with the world!

Alma. [*Slowly.*] All's right with you—and I'm glad—oh yes, I am, very glad! You haven't a horrid man coming down you're engaged to.

Margaret. [*With a brusque turn, stopping the hammock in its swing.*] Poor little girl, poor little girl!

[*She bends over ALMA, and kisses her tenderly.*]

Alma. [*Sitting up and throwing her arms around MARGARET.*] Anyhow you're going to be happy, and that's something. I'm awfully fond of you, Maggie dear. And I've only known you two days.

Margaret. [*Caressing her cheek.*] I'm fond of you too, little

Alma. . . . I never had a sister. . . .

Alma. [*Confidentially, as she nestles against MARGARET.*] Maggie, when we're married, that man and I, I mean to run away.

Margaret. Do you, though?

Alma. [*Nodding her head.*] I do. And there'll be a SCANDAL.

Margaret. In capital letters?

Alma. [*Stretching out her arms.*] So big! . . . Don't laugh at me, Maggie! Oh, isn't it a shame?

Margaret. [*Slowly.*] It's a wicked, horrible, sinful shame. . . .

Alma. And I *could* love, you know—I could love a man so much! I've thought of him often—just what he'd say to me, and I to him—where we'd walk down here, and the things I'd show him, and that he'd be so fond of, because they were

mine. I've thought of us, sitting here, in my corner—and I was holding his hand, and looking into his eyes—and I could say what I liked to him, because he'd understand—as you do, Maggie dear . . . And there are only you and he, you know—and Roland, sometimes . . . And they make me marry Mr. Marillier!

Margaret. [*Taking her arms from ALMA, and moving slowly away.*] Yes. . . . Mr. Marillier, Mr. Marillier . . . [*She makes an effort, comes back quickly, and resumes her gaiety.*] Alma dear, don't let's think of him now—let's think of nothing at all, any more than the butterflies do! Where will *they* be to-morrow? And see how happy they are! Let's be fairies, we two, and forget—forget the world, forget everything—shall we? Ah, there goes the squirrel—off to another tree. Squirrel, squirrel, come back soon! When he *does* come, Alma, I'll lay hold of him, and give him to your father. I don't believe he has a squirrel.

Alma. No—only birds—he's so fond of birds. But I've not been in his room for a very long time. He hates anyone going in there.

Margaret. Not even Alicia?

Alma. Not even Alicia! He calls it his Hermitage.

Margaret. I'll try to coax him—I want to go there very much. I'm a hermit, too, of a sort.

Alma. [*Looking up at her.*] It's wonderful how fond you've made them all of you, Maggie dear! Alicia never thought, when she asked you down—

Margaret. No. But, you see, I'm a marvellous person, really—a bit of a witch. Look at this ring I wear on my little finger—well, it's a magic one, you know—and everyone who comes within the radius has to love me. Of course that doesn't apply to Hammersmith.

Alma. [*Laughing.*] Oh, Maggie!

Margaret. Have to love me, you know—have to. That's why even Alicia—But Mr. Hanks is a dear, he really is, isn't he?

Alma. Oh yes, he is! If only—

Margaret. A fairy draper, your father called him, when he came to see me, two thousand years ago! It *does* seem such a

long time! And I've only been here two days. Fancy! Two days ago I didn't know you, nor you me.

Alma. I was sure I should love you, Maggie. But I didn't think that *you*——

Margaret. [*With her face close to ALMA'S.*] We're all hungry to love someone, aren't we? Waiting, waiting—life's so empty without it! And there's a big lake, now, in my heart, that's called Lake Alma. Deep—so deep that you can dive right down in it for weeks and weeks—and all the little fishes that are swimming around are calling out, "Alma, Alma!"

Alma. [*Nestling closer to her.*] Dear Maggie!

Margaret. [*With sudden deep, tender feeling.*] Oh my child, my child, how I wish I could help you! But that's wrong—that's wrong—we mustn't go back to real things. . . . Ah, I hear voices. Whose?

By the pricking of my thumbs
Something wicked this way comes!

[TONY and ROLAND come in through the trees at back; she goes eagerly, and with an excitement she can scarcely master, to TONY.]

Margaret. Tony!

Tony. How are you, Maggie? It's all right . . . about that contract. . . .

Margaret. It is?

Tony. Quite—quite—there'll be no trouble at all.

Margaret. [*With a deep sigh of relief.*] Alma, this is Captain Erquen—and a very dear friend of mine. Roland's sister, Tony. [TONY and ALMA shake hands.]

Roland. He won't stop, Maggie—isn't he vexing? says he must get back to town.

Tony. [*Laughing.*] Seeing that I'm off to India on Friday! And that doesn't leave too much time to pacify a manager who has suddenly lost his star!

Margaret. Why, Tony, he's not going to be troublesome, is he?

Tony. [*Producing some letters from his breast-pocket.*] Well, I'll just show you the correspondence that has passed. . . .

Roland. Oh, we'll leave you to talk over your business.

Come, Alma. Marillier will be here pretty soon—they came down by the same train.

Alma. [*Shrinking.*] Oh!

Roland. And Alicia's buzzing around, and wanting to know where you are.

Alma. Oh Roland, I don't want to see him! Let me go off, and hide!

[*She runs out, he after her, shouting, "Alma, Alma!" MARGARET'S eyes follow them for a moment, then she turns eagerly to TONY.*

Margaret. So it's all right?

Tony. Quite—oh quite! You needn't have the least fear. You've been anxious?

Margaret. Terribly!

Tony. He only arrived this morning. I met him at the station. He'll say nothing.

Margaret. [*With another sigh of relief.*] Ah! [*She sits.*

Tony. He agreed at once—I'll do him that justice—and I really believe the last thing in the world he'd dream of would be to—harm you.

Margaret. How can I thank you, Tony!

[*She holds out her hand to him.*

Tony. [*Going to her, pressing her hand, then sitting by her side.*] Poor Maggie! These two days must have been fearfully trying.

Margaret. One never knew . . . and besides . . . it has all been so difficult . . .

Tony. Everyone here adores you, Roland says?

Margaret. I think they like me . . . The question is now——

Tony. You needn't worry about Marillier—you've nothing to fear from him. He had . . . almost . . . forgotten . . . too.

Margaret. Ah!

Tony. [*Speaking with difficulty.*] You, apparently, were only one . . . episode . . . out of . . . very many . . . He . . . roared . . . when I told him.

Margaret. [*Frowning.*] Roared?

Tony. Seemed to think it—funny . . . Not a very . . . charming . . . person . . .

Margaret. No.

Tony. [*Savagely.*] I was sorely tempted to pitch him out of the train. However, I didn't. Wouldn't have been much of a loss for Lady Alma.

Margaret. The poor child!

Tony. He's madly in love with her, you know—madly, preposterously.³ Raved about her—raved is the word—all the way down.

Margaret. Where is he, Tony?

Tony. Gone home to change—it seems he has bought a place close by. I thought I'd run down, and tell you.

Margaret. Thank you, Tony.

Tony. Also to say—good-bye.

Margaret. Good-bye! When do you sail?

Tony. The day after to-morrow.

Margaret. Oh! Then this is the last time——

Tony. [*Shortly.*] Yes. [*He rises.*] So, Maggie, you've got them all at your feet?

Margaret. My fate hangs in the balance; it depends on Lady Studland.

Tony. Who's she?

Margaret. Roland's sister-in-law—Mr. Hanks's daughter.

Tony. A terror, of course?

Margaret. I fancy she means well. And she adores her children.

Tony. That her only virtue?

Margaret. She may have others. I've . . . truckled . . . to her—tried to—win her.

Tony. Poor Maggie!

Margaret. It hasn't been . . . pleasant. But you see she's all-powerful. And it means such a lot to Roland getting their consent. He's very weak, the dear boy.

Tony. [*Grumbling.*] That's a great quality.

Margaret. What do you mean?

Tony. It appeals to women. Well, Maggie—[*he moves towards her*] there's nothing else I can do?

Margaret. Yes.

Tony. What?

Margaret. Forgive me.

Tony. Forgive you! What for?

Margaret. For the good years of your life I've wasted.

Tony. [*With a shrug.*] Why?

Margaret. It was very wrong of me not to have sent you away before . . .

Tony. I was free to go, if I chose. I've been rather a fool, of course.

Margaret. [*Stretching ut her hands to him.*] Not a fool, Tony—no! A dear friend, the dearest of friends. When a woman has the good fortune to meet a man like you——

Tony. [*With a grim little laugh.*] It's a bit rough on the man.

Margaret. [*Reproachfully.*] Tony!

Tony. He's called the most beautiful names—and assured he's a wonderful person—and he spends his life sending mugs to his god-children.

Margaret. [*With mild rebuke.*] Do you regret so much what you've done for me, Tony?

Tony. [*Stoutly.*] Not a bit—you know that. And I suppose I'd do it all over again.

Margaret. I shall miss you terribly.

Tony. Oh no you won't! I've only been the big dog, Maggie, that was kept in the kennel in the yard.

Margaret. Tony! Don't be unkind.

Tony. And who was sometimes taken for a walk. . . . I enjoyed the walks, mind you. And I always kept to heel.

Margaret. [*Wounded.*] How can you say such things to me to-day, when we're bidding each other good-bye? Don't you know how you hurt me?

Tony. Don't take it too seriously—only one of my usual growls! Then you'd come, and pat me, and bring me a biscuit—and I was the happiest dog in all the world! But, you know, seriously, isn't it a funny thing? Everyone's always raving about love, love, love—and the real greatest lovers are the fellows who are always left out in the cold.

Margaret. They're the best men, Tony.

Tony. Yes—at the other chap's wedding! Well, good-bye, Maggie dear—I must be off.

Margaret. You can't stay?

Tony. Must catch the 12.45. Besides, you don't need me

any more. No trouble with Marillier—I guarantee that—not the least fear of it. And I hear the wedding-bells in the distance! Good-bye.

Margaret. You'll write to me?

Tony. Of course. And I'll send some tiger skins for Roland to stretch his legs upon. Can I get to the station this way, without going back to the house?

Margaret. Yes, there's a short cut—I'll show you.

[As they turn to go, ROLAND and GEOFFREY come and meet them.]

Roland. Maggie, that girl has gone and hidden herself; there'll be such a row! Oh, Cap, this is my brother. Lord Studland—Captain Erquen, Geoff—an old friend of Maggie's. *[GEOFFREY and TONY shake hands.]* Had you finished your business, you two?

Tony. Yes; I was just going.

Roland. Nonsense; you'll stay to lunch!

Geoffrey. A fine day, you know—rarest thing in the country. . . .

Tony. Thanks—I must get back. There's a train I can just catch.

Geoffrey. *[Who has been staring hard at him.]* Captain Erquen, I'll lay three to one you're a bachelor!

Tony. *[Laughing.]* You've won!

Geoffrey. Extraordinary thing—I can always spot 'em, first glance! *[He and TONY shake hands.]* Good-bye.

Roland. *[Shaking hands with TONY.]* I'll walk with you to the—

Margaret. No, Roland dear, I'll see him off.

Roland. All right—if you'd rather. Good-bye, Cap!

Tony. *[Shaking hands with ROLAND.]* Good-bye. You know, Maggie, it's really not necessary; if you'd just tell me the way—

Margaret. Tony, Tony, we shan't have many more walks together!

[She and TONY go off; ROLAND's eyes follow her till she is out of sight, then he turns to GEOFFREY, who has dropped into the hammock, and is proceeding to fill his pipe.]

Roland. Old chap! She is splendid, isn't she?

Geoffrey. [*Vaguely, as he strikes a match.*] Who?

Roland. Well, I don't mean Alicia!

Geoffrey. [*Gravely, as he throws down the match, having lit his pipe.*] My wife, Roland.

Roland. [*Laughing.*] Drop it, drop it! I say, the way she's waltzed round them!

Geoffrey. [*Puffing at his pipe, as he lies on his back and stares at the sky.*] You're a lucky young devil. Always were. From the very beginning. Why was I in such a deuce of a hurry?

Roland. [*Patting him on the shoulder.*] They made you marry her, old chap. Wasn't your fault.

Geoffrey. [*Turning to him.*] Delicacy, Roland, was never your strong point. What I was driving at was why I was in such a hurry to be born first. If I hadn't been so impatient——

Roland. [*Squatting at the foot of the hammock.*] Never mind all that, old Geoff! Make the best of things! But I say——

Geoffrey. Do you know the latest? She wants me to make a speech in the House.

Roland. [*Yelling.*] No!

Geoffrey. It's a fact. "You don't even ask a question," she says. "They never mention your name." I must make a speech. Next week.

Roland. [*Impatiently.*] Well, make it, Geoff—make it! But don't be so beastly selfish. You only want to talk about yourself. Isn't Margaret——

Geoffrey. [*On his back again.*] Full dress debate, I told her, next week—no chance for a private member, But *she* don't care! Make a speech, she says—I *will* have you make a speech! Distinguish yourself! [*He turns.*] Oh, Roland, I don't want any harm to happen to the dear old guv'nor, but I wish I were in the House of Lords!

Roland. [*Who has scarcely been listening.*] Make your speech, and be blowed to you! I want to know what you think of Margaret.

Geoffrey. I've told you—she's a ripper—she's fine. But

you never can tell. *She'll be wanting you to make speeches perhaps, when you're married.*

Roland. [Laughing, and slapping him on the back.] Poor old Geoff! Buck up! Never say die, Geoff! And she's fond of you—she likes you—she has told me——

Geoffrey. [Staring at the sky.] I *might* ask a question about the kitchen—I'm sure the mutton I had yesterday came from Canada——

Roland. [Impatiently.] Do drop all that rot! What do I care about your mutton! Alicia likes her, doesn't she?

Geoffrey. She said to me last night—she woke me up to say it—she had no idea that persons in that walk of life came so near to being a lady.

Roland. [Furious.] Came so near! The infernal cheek!

Geoffrey. [Gravely.] You are speaking of my wife, Roland.

Roland. How dare she say that!

Geoffrey. [With a chuckle.] You old ass! It's high praise from Alicia! Yes—she likes her. I dozed off—and she woke me up again—and said that, after all, Miss Verrall was quite a nice person——

Roland. Nice! Aha!

Geoffrey. And that Miss Hilling had displayed such a violent temper——

Roland. Bit of luck that was—they had quite a row! O Geoff, old man, it's great! I knew they'd only to see her!

Geoffrey. [Staring into the sky again.] If it weren't for the kiddies, I'd bolt. I would. Get the Salvation Army to send me to Canada.

Roland. Just because of that beastly speech!

Geoffrey. The one thing that keeps me going is the chance of an all-night debate. If they had any sense, those Johnnies, they'd always arrange it the night of a Covent Garden Ball. My! The time I had!

Roland. She didn't suspect?

Geoffrey. You're not supposed to look very festive when you've spent eighteen hours in that stuffy hole in Westminster. And I always dress when I go down there. On the chance.

Roland. Poor old Geoff!

Geoffrey. It's not all syrup and saucepans, I can tell you. However, *you're* all right. She has quite got over old Hanks. He calls her a charming young person.

Roland. He has heard the guv'nor say that, of course.

Geoffrey. Yes. How he worships the guv'nor! But I wish he wouldn't try to speak like him. One in a family's quite enough. Roland, about this speech——

Roland. [*Rising.*] Oh, never mind that!

Geoffrey. [*With real terror.*] Roland, I've got to make it!

Roland. Well, how will you manage?

Geoffrey. I think I'll get one of those infernally clever Irish fellows to write it for me. [*He turns over to ROLAND.*] Roland, my boy, we're just a couple of pudding-headed owls, we two.

Roland. I say! Speak for yourself!

Geoffrey. [*Rolling on his back again.*] You think you're superior because you know something about the inside of an engine. Bah! You try to earn your living at it!

Roland. [*Good-humouredly.*] Never mind that, old Geoff! Genius don't run our way, I know. But I tell you what I *am* proud of—and that's having made Margaret love me.

Geoffrey. [*Staring at the sky again.*] Luck.

Roland. And I tell you—dear old chap, I *can* tell you—well, I just *worship* her—I do—that's the word. And—Geoff—don't mind my saying it—but I don't like hearing you talk about Covent Garden balls.

Geoffrey. [*Rolling big eyes.*] My stars!

Roland. Oh, I've changed a good deal since I've got to know Margaret, and to love her. O Geoff, she's so wonderful! There never *was* a mind like hers, Geoff—it's so—so noble—so—so like crystal—yes, it is! D'you know, I read somewhere, in one of her books, about some other woman—that no thought that wasn't pure and beautiful could even *live* in her presence. Well, that's true of *her*. One doesn't understand it, of course, just at first, but that's how she is. And naturally I've changed—I'm different too. She's—she's just the nearest thing to a—she's the most——

[*A mild snore comes from GEOFFREY, who has fallen placidly asleep.*]

Roland. Geoff!

[He bends over the hammock, and shakes GEOFFREY roughly.]

Geoffrey. *[Waking up.]* Hullo!—Oh, awfully sorry, old chap—habit I've got into, you see.

Roland. I did think that you——

Geoffrey. *[Looking down the avenue.]* There's old Hanks—and the gov'nor. Hullo, they've seen us—they're coming this way. *[He waves a hand to them.]* To speak to you about Miss Verrall, I'll wager.

Roland. *[Excitedly.]* O Geoff, do you really believe——

Geoffrey. Old Hanks's face is beaming like an advertisement for whiskey. Lucky dog you are!

[HANKS and the DUKE come in, and go straight to ROLAND. HANKS evidently makes it the business of his life to speak in the florid manner of the DUKE, and to round his sentences with similar elegance. The effort is, however, rather apparent; and while he very rarely actually misplaces an aspirate, he is obliged always to keep a watchful eye upon them. ROLAND has risen; GEOFFREY remains in his hammock. MR. HANKS goes straight to ROLAND.]

Mr. Hanks. Roland, my dear boy, I have good news for you: your noble father and I have been discussing your future.

Roland. *[Awkwardly.]* Very good of you, Mr. Hanks.

Duke. *[Sitting.]* Miss Verrall, Roland, has made the most delightful impression on our worthy friend here, and his daughter.

Hanks. Alicia is pleased with her—most pleased. Alicia is inclined—I am betraying no secret, Roland—to allow you—to recommend, I should say, your noble father to allow you—to follow the dictates of your heart.

Roland. *[Enthusiastically.]* Oh, Mr. Hanks, that's fine!

Hanks. *[Beaming, and expanding, but still on stilts.]* There is no cause for you, my dear Roland, to leave the Army. I shall esteem it a privilege to be allowed to provide—er, that is, the Duke——

Duke. My dear Mr. Hanks, you need have no scruple in

flying your own flag over your own generosity! [*To ROLAND.*] Our friend has informed me, Roland, that Miss Hilling has given displeasure; and that Alicia renounces the alliance with the House of Pigs.

Hanks. [*Chuckling.*] The House of Pigs! Really, duke, I must remember that! [*He turns to ROLAND, puts both hands on the boy's shoulders—all affectation falls from him, and he speaks volubly, naturally and affectionately, with a touch of real emotion.*] My boy, my boy, you can't think how glad I am. You'll be very happy. And I like young people to be happy. I do.

Duke. Were that sentiment universal, we could burn all our books on morality.

Hanks. Well, I do—I mean it. And I'm glad—I can't tell you *how* glad! Because, you see—well, this is almost the very first time I've been able to—well, you know—to do just exactly the sort of thing that everyone wanted. The thing that would please you all, and show you how pleased I am to be able to please you. . . . And if I *do* make just a little bit of a sacrifice—because of what I've been brought up to, you know, and so on—well, I'm just glad to make it, that's all, for the sake of our Roland here. Because I'm a decent chap, really, and you've been very good to me, and I'm very fond of you all.

Duke. My dear Mr. Hanks, you've been very good to us.

Hanks. [*More and more volubly and excitedly.*] You've treated me fine—yes, you have—and I tell you I'm grateful. You're gentlefolk, and I'm a draper—Bollings and Hanks—can't get away from it, and never could. Began life on three shillings a week and slept under the counter. Bollings and Anks [*he clenches his teeth*] Hanks—I'm just a tradesman, and proud of it too, in a way, because the money's all been made honest—and you've treated me splendid—never sneered or made me feel small—and I couldn't be fonder of you if I was your father—and your brother, duke, that I couldn't. And I thank you all—and I don't know why I've said this to-day—and I shouldn't be surprised if my grammar was rocky and my words quite common—but it's been just a chance to say it when I've been able to do something for my

boy Roland here, and help him to the girl he loves—and, Roland, she's a damned fine girl, and I don't care who hears me say it!

[*He digs ROLAND in the ribs; ALICIA comes in and sees him doing it.*]

Alicia. [*Shocked beyond words.*] Father!

Hanks. [*Retreating into his shell at once.*] My dear?

Alicia. [*After an indignant glance that speaks volumes, lets her eyes rest on GEOFFREY.*] Geoffrey! What are you doing there?

Geoffrey. [*Uncoiling himself from the hammock.*] I was—just listening, *Alicia*. . . .

Alicia. [*Reproachfully.*] And Mr. Marillier arriving at any moment! Please go to the house, and be there to receive him. You too, Roland. And Alma—where is she?

Roland. [*Vaguely.*] She's about somewhere.

Alicia. About somewhere! Surely she has been told—*hasn't* she been told?

Geoffrey. I don't know.

Alicia. It is most improper! And you all here doing nothing! I don't mean *you*, duke, of course.

Duke. [*Mildly.*] Thank you.

Geoffrey. [*As he goes off with ROLAND.*] What are we to do with Marillier, when he comes?

Alicia. [*Shaking her head at him.*] Do with him, do with him! Go, please.

[*GEOFFREY and ROLAND go; ALICIA takes the seat the DUKE has vacated; he sits on one side of her, HANKS standing on the other.*]

Alicia. Duke, you will have to speak very severely to Alma.

Hanks. [*Eagerly.*] My dear, she didn't know perhaps the train he was coming by—I should say, by which train he was coming.

Alicia. [*Shortly.*] Rubbish. He wrote to her. We all knew.

Hanks. Perhaps I can find her——

[*He is about to sidle off—she stops him.*]

Alicia. Stay here, father, please. Duke, a word with you—about Miss Verrall. I am very much taken with her—I

should never have believed it possible—but there it is. She shows quite a nice appreciation of things.

Duke. [*Blandly.*] Quite.

Alicia. Not born in the purple, of course—and, very evidently, not one of *us*. And her manners—well, they will improve. The inquiries we have made were *most* satisfactory—there can be no doubt as to her moral character—absolutely none. And, duke, I have come to ask you not to let her humble birth or—degrading occupation—stand in the way.

Duke. Since the decision is left with me, Alicia—

Alicia. They love each other—there can be no doubt as to that—

Hanks. [*With a chuckle.*] None!

Alicia. And she has qualities—marked and distinguished qualities. She is, I need scarcely say, prepared to leave the stage. She has shown a very proper spirit in freeing herself now. I would like, duke, most earnestly, to plead the cause of the—young couple.

Duke. My dear Alicia, they could have no more influential advocate. At your solicitation I am prepared to waive every objection of mine.

Hanks. [*Enthusiastically.*] That's splendid, splendid! Bless 'em both, I say!

Alicia. My dear father, this is not a harlequinade. . . . We are doing the unconventional thing, duke—the unusual thing—but, after all! And Miss Hilling has been very rude to me. I infinitely prefer Miss Verrall to Miss Hilling.

Hanks. [*With a chuckle.*] The daughter of the House of Pigs!

Alicia. The epigram, father, is in doubtful taste. So, duke, shall we boldly discard our—aristocratic prejudices?

Duke. I place mine at Miss Verrall's feet.

Alicia. And I may tell her—

Duke. You have my fullest consent.

Alicia. Very well, then—that's settled. [*MARGARET comes in.*] Ah, Miss Verrall! We were just talking of you.

Margaret. I have been to the station with Captain Erquen.

Alicia. You haven't come across Alma?

Margaret. No.

Alicia. The vexing girl! However—my dear Miss Verrall, we have something to say to you.

Duke. [*Rising.*] My dear Alicia, you shall be left alone to say it. Come, Mr. Hanks, let us leave these ladies. [*He pauses as he passes by MARGARET, and takes her hand.*] Alicia has a communication to make to you—I will not forestall it. But—let me assure you—it has my heartiest concurrence.

Margaret. [*Gratefully.*] Duke!

Duke. [*Whispering.*] Although you haven't brought Ibsen and Tolstoy with you!

[*He links his arm in that of HANKS, and they go off together.*]

Alicia. [*Motioning MARGARET to a seat by her side.*] My dear Miss Verrall, you can guess the nature of my communication. You were invited here as a friend—an ordinary acquaintance. I will not dwell upon the Duke's objections to his son marrying an actress. I have succeeded in overcoming—those objections. He—consents.

Margaret. [*Genuinely happy.*] Oh, Lady Studland, how can I thank you!

Alicia. Well, I have done what I could. I admit I have—worked for you. But we have been together a great deal, you and I, these past two days—and I like you. We became friends very quickly. My dear Margaret [*she holds out her hand.*] I welcome you cordially.

Margaret. [*With real gratitude.*] Lady Studland—

Alicia. You may call me Alicia. Margaret, my position in this house is a difficult one—no one knows *how* difficult. I don't believe anyone cares for me—

Margaret. [*Pressing the hand she still holds.*] Alicia!

Alicia. Except my children! If I hadn't *them*! And—you mayn't believe it, perhaps—but I *want* people to like me—so much!

Margaret. But surely—

Alicia. [*Shaking her head.*] You needn't—I know well enough. It's—it's—well, of course, they think that I interfere. But look at them—they're so weedy, you know—it's the family failing! Oh, the Duke's very fine, of course, but without the *least* will of his own—and all he cares about really

is his ridiculous birds! And Geoffrey—you can't think what a difficult man he is! I assure you, Margaret, what *he'd* like best would be to stay in bed all day! Then there's Alma——

Margaret. [*Unconsciously.*] Poor Alma!

Alicia. [*Sharply withdrawing her hand, and opening wide eyes.*] Poor Alma! My dear Margaret! why poor?

Margaret. [*Embarrassed.*] Dear Alicia—she doesn't seem—fond of—Mr. Marillier——

Alicia. [*Reproachfully.*] Margaret, Margaret, don't *you* be like the others, and think me a tyrant! Poor Alma! And not fond of him!

Margaret. [*Awkwardly.*] From what she says——

Alicia. Do you think that child knows? She's merely a dreamer—she's the most unpractical creature that ever lived. My dear friend, she'd refuse *any* man—just because she's too indolent to accept him. That's her character, Margaret.

Margaret. [*Hesitatingly.*] Still——

Alicia. [*Stopping her with a gesture.*] Oh, I've thought it all out—believe me, I'm acting in her very best interest! She needs someone to guide her, to do things for her. And Marillier's quite the ideal. Older, of course—but then you see he won't resent her cranky ways, as a younger man would. The ideal, I assure you. I've studied him, of course. I know.

Margaret. [*Timidly laying a hand on ALICIA's arm.*] But—forgive me—are you quite sure——

Alicia. [*In genuine amazement.*] My dear Margaret! If I were *not* quite sure, would I, do you think, have tried to persuade her? He is of the highest moral character—the way he talks about woman quite moves me—it really does. And so transparent—one reads him like a book. But of course you know him yourself.

Margaret. So many years ago . . .

Alicia. Oh, he hasn't changed! And religious, you know—goes to Chapel twice every Sunday—*so* attentive during the sermon! And that stamps a man, doesn't it?

Margaret. [*Against herself.*] Yes . . .

Alicia. He used to be Church of England—well, I had many talks with him—oh, I'm not going to boast! But it's a

point on which I feel deeply—and the words just came. The others all go to Church—he and I, and father, attend the Chapel. I'm rather hoping that *you*—but I won't add anything now to what I said yesterday. You promised to think it over. And as you're going to be one of the family, Margaret—and I'm very glad of it—I am, indeed——

[*GEOFFREY and MARILLIER have come in, not speaking a word, GEOFFREY stalking stolidly by MARILLIER's side.*

Alicia. Ah! Mr. Marillier!

[*She rises and steps towards him.*

Marillier. How do you do, Lady Studland? [*They shake hands.*] Miss Verrall! I'm so glad to meet you again!

[*He holds out his hand; she touches it with the tip of her fingers.*

Alicia. You haven't found Alma, Geoffrey?

Geoffrey. I've not been looking for Alma—I don't know where she is.

Alicia. [*Sourly.*] I thought I told you——

Marillier. Dear Lady Studland, don't trouble——

Alicia. [*Discontentedly.*] She forgets everything—she'll be mooning somewhere—it's most annoying. Let's go to the house.

Geoffrey. Miss Hilling's there, with her mother.

Alicia. [*Stopping.*] Miss Hilling!

Geoffrey. With her mother, Mrs. Tesdorp Hilling. And they, and the gov'nor, and Mr. Hanks, and Roland, are sitting in a row in the drawing-room, like a lot of nigger minstrels—only no one's saying anything, and they haven't blacked their faces.

Alicia. Don't they know—haven't they been told——

Geoffrey. They're waiting for you.

Alicia. [*Briskly.*] I'll go at once. Come, Geoffrey. No, Margaret, stay here—[*with a smile*] the lady's your rival! Stay here with Mr. Marillier. You'll be glad to talk over old times. Should I meet Alma I'll send her to you. Au revoir!

[*She and GEOFFREY go, he grumbling, and she reproving him. MARGARET and MARILLIER stand he rather sheepfaced, but putting on a bold ana*

smiling front, she looking quietly at him; and neither speaks a word till the others' voices have died away. Then he suddenly bursts into a nervous, mirthless laughter.

Margaret. [*In a low voice.*] Yes—it's funny, of course.

Marillier. [*Encouraged.*] By Jove, but it is though, isn't it? Fancy our meeting—like this.

Margaret. [*Never taking her eyes off him.*] Yes.

Marillier. [*With slightly forced joviality.*] 'Pon my soul—well, really when Erquen told me——

Margaret. You had forgotten, you said. Well, I had, too. And we'll go on—forgetting.

Marillier. [*With a sigh of relief.*] That's best, of course—and the only thing to do. I'm afraid I behaved—rather badly.

Margaret. [*Coldly.*] You are magnanimous.

[*She sits, with her back to him.*

Marillier. [*Sidling round to her.*] But you must remember, of course, the kind of—training—I'd had. A youngster with lots of money—and the very worst sort of companions—from the time I was a boy. I was an awful young blackguard, I admit. Frankly, I'm sorry. Let's shake.

[*He holds out his hand with a certain rough, but sincere cordiality; she makes no movement; after a moment he lets his hand fall.*

Margaret. [*Quietly.*] That is a formality we shall probably often have to go through before others; with your permission we will discard it when we are alone.

Marillier. [*With a shrug.*] Unforgiving!

Margaret. You and I, Mr. Marillier, met each other casually twelve years ago—and I have not seen you since.

Marillier. [*Carelessly.*] That is what we shall tell them, of course.

Margaret. [*With a rising passion she finds it difficult to control.*] But . . . as I look at you . . . I remember . . . many things . . . I remember . . . all!

Marillier. [*With genuine appeal.*] Maggie!

Margaret. [*Violently, starting from her chair.*] How dare you call me that!

[**MARILLIER** retreats a step, shamefacedly; she drops into her chair again.]

Marillier. [*Gnawing his moustache, twisting and untwisting his hands.*] I . . . I apologize . . . I . . . I . . . I've told you—I'm sorry . . . I am, really—awfully, genuinely sorry. If it were a question of any possible . . . reparation . . .

Margaret. [*Quietly, with a sudden inspiration.*] There is.

Marillier. [*Eagerly.*] I give you my word I'd do anything—anything. I'm not a bad chap at bottom. As a youngster, you know, there were things one thought fine—one wanted to be—wicked. I was a fearful scoundrel, I know. At least I've kept my mouth shut. I had the decency even then—give me the credit for it—never to breathe your name.

Margaret. [*Her eyes fixed on him.*] You spoke of reparation.

Marillier. I'll do what I can; I'll help you in every way to marry Roland.

Margaret. I don't need your help—they consent.

Marillier. [*Sitting.*] I'm glad—I am, I'm awfully glad. I suppose you were frightened when you heard about me—you were, of course, or you wouldn't have told Erquen. Well, you needn't have been. I'm not that sort.

Margaret. [*Slowly.*] If you really have changed——

Marillier. [*Eagerly.*] I have, I have, I assure you—I'm a different man altogether.

Margaret. Then there's one thing you can do—one reparation you can offer.

Marillier. I'll do anything you like—any mortal thing.

Margaret. Then give up Alma.

Marillier. [*Starting to his feet.*] What!!!

Margaret. Give up Alma—yes. The girl hates you.

Marillier. [*Hoarsely, the veins standing out.*] Don't say that—don't say that——

Margaret. She has run away from you now—she detests the sight of you.

Marillier. [*Violently.*] It's a lie—an abominable lie!

Margaret. [*Looking steadily at him.*] You know it's true.

Marillier. It's not—it's not! Last time I saw her, she told me herself that she was sorry for me, that she——

Margaret. Women aren't sorry for the men they want to marry.

Marillier. [*With sudden suspicion.*] I see what it is—you've been putting her against me!

Margaret. I've never mentioned your name—it was *she* who spoke.

Marillier. [*Passionately, uncontrollably, almost pathetic in his earnestness.*] I love her! Mar—Miss Verrall, I love her. It's not the ordinary sort of love—it's adoration, frenzy. I——

Margaret. [*Coldly.*] She hates you.

Marillier. [*Wiping his brow.*] Don't say those horrible things—how *can* you be so cruel! And it's not true—you know that it isn't. *You* hate me—I can understand that—though I think after all these years. . . . But she? She's only a child, and it's merely because she's so timid——

Margaret. She turns from you instinctively; she realizes things.

Marillier. What things? I'm no worse than the others.

Margaret. I should be sorry if that were true.

Marillier. Why *will* you harp on the past? Can't you make any allowance? I was only a boy, and I'd been led astray. I've changed, I tell you. I'm a different man altogether.

Margaret. What sort of life have you been leading, since?

Marillier. [*Boldly.*] I——

Margaret. [*With a shrug.*] You needn't! It's on your face. And she sees it.

Marillier. [*Impulsively.*] Look here, I'll be frank with you. I've nothing to boast of. Out there in Africa—well, that's all over. A dog's life—and one didn't have much respect for women. But—since I've met Alma—I tell you I'm changed.

Margaret. Changed! You want this girl now—as once you wanted me.

Marillier. [*Violently, with a step towards her.*] How dare you!

Margaret. What else?

Marillier. I want her to be my wife.

Margaret. [*With a shrug.*] The wonderful difference!

Marillier. [*Struggling to remain calm.*] You're making things very . . . difficult. . . . This is not what I . . . expected . . . I told myself when I heard you were here, that we should be friends now——

Margaret. [*Scornfully.*] Friends!

Marillier. As it were, partners. . . . You want to marry Roland, I Alma. We can help each other.

Margaret. I see.

Marillier. I've got over Lady Studland. It wasn't easy—but I've done it.

Margaret. Grovelled to her!

Marillier. What else have *you* been doing, if you've got her to consent?

Margaret. Yes, I've grovelled, too.

Marillier. Of course: there you are: don't let 's throw stones at each other. Well, just listen to me: I tell you, solemnly, as though this were the last moment I had to live, I love Alma: I love her with a love that . . . hurts . . . and she'll love me, in time—she must. . . .

Margaret. [*Quietly.*] Never.

Marillier. Don't say those things! Have you no pity? I tell you she will—she must. I'll be so good to her that—She doesn't dislike me, really.

Margaret. She does.

Marillier. It's not true! *You* hate me—and so you imagine—D'you think that she'd have consented——

Margaret. Lady Studland made her.

Marillier. No one can make a girl marry a man she hates.

Margaret. It's being done every day all over the world.

Marillier. [*Pettishly.*] Ridiculous! They're not such fools.

Margaret. They don't know what marriage means—that's why they consent.

Marillier. [*Going up to her and gripping the back of her chair.*] Look here, what's the use? D'you think I'll give her up?

Margaret. If you really loved her, you would.

Marillier. [*Harshly.*] I won't—do you hear that? [*With*

rising passion.] I won't—I can't! And don't talk like that any more—I don't like it. . . . [*With a note of menace.*] As I've told you, we're partners.

Margaret. [*Quietly, looking at him.*] Are we?

Marillier. [*Doggedly.*] We are: and you've got to see it.

Margaret. How?

Marillier. When I heard you were here—and all I've said to you was genuine—my one idea was to help you—to do all I could. But I was certain, of course, that *you* would help me.

Margaret. [*Quietly.*] No.

Marillier. [*Stopping in front of her, and facing her squarely.*] Well, you've got to.

Margaret. What do you mean?

Marillier. You know well enough what I mean. The girl's wild about you—they've told me—adores you, and so on. She'll do what you tell her.

Margaret. Well?

Marillier. [*Deliberately.*] And you . . . will serve me . . . and be on my side.

Margaret. A threat?

Marillier. You force me to it.

Margaret. You mean, if I don't, you'll—tell?

Marillier. [*Wildly.*] Go against me, I'll tell—I will!

[*A moment's silence—he stands before her, glaring at her, his breath coming in gasps, horribly excited. She remains unmoved—at least outwardly—and has never taken her eyes off him.*]

Margaret. The reparation you spoke of!

Marillier. [*Violently.*] That's what you're doing—you're bringing up all that's bad in me. I don't want to harm you—God knows I don't—I'll do anything in the world. . . . But you mustn't come between me and Alma.

Margaret. [*Slowly.*] You mean this?

Marillier. I'm fighting for life—yes, I am. And it's you who've threatened—not I.

Margaret. I've said nothing.

Marillier. You've shown me you don't want Alma to marry me.

Margaret. Isn't that natural?

Marillier. No, it isn't. She's consented, we're engaged—all has gone smoothly. Now you come, and want to upset things. Well, you shan't—do you understand that? You shan't. If you interfere, if you work against me—I swear to you I'll say before them all——

Margaret. [*Quietly.*] I don't think even you would do that.

Marillier. It will be your doing—not mine. But I will—I swear it!

Margaret. [*Rising, contemptuously.*] Oh, you needn't! I believe you.

Marillier. [*Moving away, digging his hands in his pockets.*] Very well then—let's say no more.

Margaret. [*With her back to him.*] There's nothing more to be said.

Marillier. [*With a sudden movement towards her, and speaking with real emotion.*] If you knew, if you knew, what my feeling is for her! . . . Don't be hard on me.

Margaret. [*Turning fiercely on him.*] Hard! When you know that she hates you!

Marillier. [*Feebly.*] She doesn't, she doesn't—I've told you before——

Margaret. [*Scornfully.*] You know, but you don't care. You'll marry her, all the same.

Marillier. [*Violent again, losing all control.*] I'll marry her all the same. And if you interfere, I'll brand you.

Margaret. So you've said.

Marillier. I say it again, so that you may remember. Play the game, I will too. But remember—we fall—together.

Margaret. [*Looking through the trees.*] You'd better go now—Alma's coming. [*With a glance at him.*] You're not looking pretty.

Marillier. [*Cantritely.*] You've worked me up—you've half driven me mad. Forgive me.

[*She has turned her back on him, and merely gives a half-shrug.*]

Marillier. [*Sulkily.*] All right. I can't help it.

Margaret. You'd better go.

Marillier. [*His tone again becoming suspicious and threatening.*] I'll just walk to the lake and back. Don't forget what I've told you!

[*He waits for a reply—she gives none. He stalks off, R. When he has gone MARGARET moves into the alley, L., and calls, "Alma, Alma!" After a moment ALMA comes in, and goes eagerly to her.*

Margaret. Where have you been?

Alma. Up a tree.

Margaret. What?

Alma. [*Nodding.*] Up a tree—yes. It's not much of a climb, you know: one of our favourite places when we were children, and played hide and seek.

Margaret. Roland was looking for you.

Alma. He knew where I was, of course—but it's an understood thing, when I'm there, that he can't find me. No one else knew.

Margaret. I see.

Alma. Where's he gone?

Margaret. Who?

Alma. Mr. Marillier.

Margaret. I don't know—he'll be back soon.

Alma. You looked as though you were quarrelling.

Margaret. You saw us?

Alma. Oh yes—from my tree. Do you like him?

Margaret. Mr. Marillier?

Alma. Yes. Isn't he ugly?

Margaret. [*Slowly.*] I don't think women consider him that, as a rule.

Alma. [*Idly.*] I dare say. But not women like us. He's so common.

Margaret. He comes of very good family.

Alma. I suppose it's because he's been away so long. [*She pulls MARGARET into the chair, and nestles on to the ground at her feet, with her head on MARGARET's lap, and holding her hands.*] It's all over now, Maggie.

Margaret. What is?

Alm Everything. When he's here I'm just—lead. And

won't go away now, I suppose—till we're married. Last
he was here I promised Alicia—— [She stops.]

Margaret. To fix the day of the . . .

Alma. [Nodding.] Yes. The sooner the better, I think. I
n't see so much of him—then.

Margaret. [In a murmur, as she caresses her.] Poor child!

Alma. [Looking up.] What would you do if you were I?

Margaret. How can I tell?

Alma. Would you marry a man you hated?

Margaret. I wonder whether you really do hate him,
Alma?

Alma. Do you like him?

Margaret. I'm not going to marry him.

Alma. Would you?

Margaret. I love Roland.

Alma. [Dropping her head, and playing with the beads on
MARGARET'S dress.] I don't dislike him so much when he's not
there—and even when he *is* there, you know, he—he's very
amusing, and talks well, and says pleasant things—but—
well, it's quite funny—it's when he—touches me—that my
blood seems to run from me and I want to shriek.

Margaret. [Squaring her mouth.] Have you said that to
Lady Studland?

Alma. I tried to, once; and she gave me a tonic.

Margaret. A tonic?

Alma. Yes, for my nerves. One of those things they adver-
tise, you know, and you take half-an-hour after meals.

Margaret. I see.

Alma. [Nestling closer to her, and smiling into her face.]
D'you know, Margaret—Margot—I'd like to call you Margot
—may I?

Margaret. [Gently.] If you like.

Alma. [Taking MARGARET'S hand, and rubbing her cheek
against it.] I'm so fond of you, dear, that I'd like to call you
by a name no one else does, and that's all my own.

Margaret. [Kissing her.] Dear little Alma.

Alma. And Margot's sweet, isn't it? Well, Margot dear,
do you know, I thought *you* would help me.

Margaret. What can I do, dear Alma?

Alma. Tell him I hate him.

Margaret. If I did, he wouldn't believe me. And—it's a fact—he adores you.

Alma. [*Playing with MARGARET's dress again.*] At a distance I wouldn't mind. But when he puts his face close to mine, I'd as lief kiss a blackbeetle. [*She looks up, half whimsically.*] You can't really be fond of a man when you'd as lief kiss a blackbeetle—can you?

Margaret. [*Gently.*] You wouldn't make fun of it, dear, if it were really as bad as all that.

Alma. I make fun because that's the best way. I only cry at night.

Margaret. Do you cry?

Alma. When I've said my prayers. I pray so hard to be saved from Mr. Marillier—and when I've done I know Alicia will make me marry him—and I cry myself to sleep.

[*MARGARET can find nothing to say; the muscles of her mouth twitch, her lips are tightly compressed; she mechanically strokes ALMA's hair.*]

Alma. One day, when we were walking, his great foot came down on a dear little frog that was hopping across the path. When I told him, he laughed, and thought it a joke.

Margaret. [*Without thinking.*] He would.

Alma. [*Looking up.*] You think him cruel, too?

Margaret. [*Recalled to her task.*] Men aren't as sensitive to these things as we are. They're always killing.

Alma. [*Suddenly catching sight of MARILLIER, as he returns through the trees.*] There he is. I'll go. [*She jumps up.*]

Margaret. [*Detaining her.*] Stay, dear.

Alma. [*Struggling gently, in real fear.*] Let me go! let me go! He'll want to kiss me.

Margaret. [*Holding her.*] Alma——

Alma. We're engaged, you see, and he thinks——

Margaret. [*With both arms round her.*] Be sensible, Alma, dear. . . . You are engaged to him; and, after all, as you're going to marry him——

Alma. [*Ceasing to struggle, but with tender reproach in her voice.*] Oh, Margot . . . Margot . . .

[*As they stand there, together, MARILLIER comes in,*

and throws a quick glance at them. **MARGARET** leaves **ALMA**, and moves away. **ALMA** stands dumbly—meekly.

Marillier. Ah, my dear Alma! [**MARGARET** goes slowly towards the alley, her face turned from them; he advances briskly to **ALMA** with outstretched hand.] Dear Alma!

[He takes her hand—she allows him to take it—carried away by his passion he draws her towards him—she shuts her eyes and submits—then, as his lips near her cheek, she suddenly breaks away, with a stifled cry, runs to **MARGARET**, and buries her head on **MARGARET**'s shoulder. **MARILLIER** stops for a moment, stunned; then rushes to her. **MARGARET** waves him back.

Margaret. No.

Marillier. [*Fiercely.*] What do you mean?

Margaret. [*Both arms round ALMA, shielding her.*] You see for yourself. It can't be.

Marillier. [*More and more wildly.*] You?

Margaret. [*With desperate appeal.*] It can't be—surely you must see—it's not possible.

Marillier. [*With frantic menace.*] You go against me?

Margaret. I've tried—oh, I've tried.

Marillier. [*Seizing MARGARET by the arm.*] Leave us. Go!

Alma. [*Clinging closer and closer to MARGARET.*] No—no . . .

Marillier. [*Fiercely, to MARGARET.*] If you interfere—

[*He tries to pluck MARGARET's arms away.*

Margaret. [*With feverish energy, shaking him off.*] Ah, no! No, no—it shan't be! Come, Alma—we'll go to your father—we'll go at once! [*ALMA lifts her head, happy—MARGARET faces MARILLIER, who has fallen back.*] And you—do your worst! She shan't be your victim—too!

[*Gripping ALMA's hand, and before MARILLIER has had time to recover, she rushes off with her through the trees. The curtain falls as MARILLIER suddenly starts in wild pursuit, shouting "Alma, Alma, Alma!"*

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

The DUKE'S Room at Dumaray Castle. It is of irregular shape; a door at L., and wide French windows at back, which both are open, flush with the lawn. Outside is a hedge of box, some six or seven feet high, jealously shutting out the world beyond; behind the hedge, the downs rise and fall. The sun streams down, hot and dazzling.

The room displays the most curious kind of litter conceivable. The walls were once coloured with green distemper—they are now of a faded gray. Two pictures hang on it, on either side of the French windows—the one a very fanciful caricature, by Max Beerbohm, of the present DUKE—the other a full-length portrait of his father, in his Early Victorian full-dress robes. The right wall has a stout shelf, supported by iron brackets, and this shelf is filled with cages of all sorts and descriptions, rather clumsy structures, mostly empty. From a sturdy beam in the ceiling depend a dozen hooks, from three of which cages still hang, two of them containing canaries, and the third a starling. In the corner are a lathe and a broom. On the left wall is a large old-fashioned mahogany bookcase, well-filled with shabby books. There is an ancient, rickety sofa; one very old, but comfortable-looking arm-chair, and three or four other chairs, very dilapidated, and all lacking something. The floor is covered with a worn Turkey carpet, liberally garnished with holes; and the two or three rugs are no less shabby. The atmosphere of the room, for all its untidiness and poverty, is one of curious comfort; there are bowls and jars of flowers scattered about, making a brave splash of colour; and the curtains and carpet, faded and

tarnished as they are, still harmonize pleasantly with the gray-green of the wall. There is a very old-fashioned sideboard on the right, with books scattered on it.

The DUKE, in his shirt-sleeves, stands on a step-ladder: he has just taken a cage, with a Bengal parrot inside, from its hook, and is handing it to MR. HANKS, who is standing below.

Duke. Here, Mr. Hanks—take him and put him out in the sun with the others. Handle him carefully—he's rather an important bird—aren't you, Bismarck, my boy?

[He gives HANKS the cage.]

Hanks. [Inquiringly, as he takes it.] Bismarck?

Duke. I called him that because he always lets the other birds talk—but he is the lad to *do* things. Gets his beak into them when they annoy him; and they don't try it a second time. Put him outside.

[He sits on the top of the steps.]

Hanks. [Eyeing the cage.] He's a fine bird.

Duke. Comes from Bengal—ring-necked parrakeet—*psittacus minor macrovius viridis*. And to you, and every one else, he is just Pretty Polly. Put him into the sun.

Hanks. 'Pon my soul, he's blinking at me just as though he *knew*.

Duke. Perhaps he does—who can tell? He's a fairly old bird, you know—I began my collection with him—and he has seen many come and go.

Hanks. [To the bird.] Bismarck! Your Excellency! Say something—do!

Duke. Not he. But he's getting impatient—and if you stand much longer between him and the sun, I warn you his beak's rather sharp.

Hanks. Come along then, Mister Macrovius! [He takes the cage through the French windows.] Never met a silent parrot before. [He goes, L., speaking off.] There you are—a nice shady corner for you. Oh, you want the sun, do you? Well—*this* is the place for you, eh? [He returns.] Only just in time, I fancy. He was sharpening his beak on the wires.

Duke. When I'm alone with them, you know, I open the cages, and we all talk together.

Hanks. We've a bird department at Number 45—I must have a look at them next time I go there.

Duke. [*Quickly.*] Don't you be sending me one—no, no, I mean it—I never take presents.

Hanks. [*Protesting.*] Duke!

Duke. I'm a queer old bird, I know, like my Bismarck, a trifle eccentric: but then, to be frank with you, I like my little eccentricities: they amuse me, they're part of me—and it's a lonely world, and we must get all the fun we can.

Hanks. [*Who has been looking round the room while the DUKE was speaking, shaking his head.*] Well, duke, I should never have believed it!

Duke. Believed what?

Hanks. This room of yours!

Duke. What's the matter with the room?

Hanks. Why, it's so shabby, so——

Duke. Tut, tut, my dear friend, what a strange idea! Shabby? The very last adjective! Look at that bookcase now—my first recollection, when I was a toddler of four or five, I imagine, was rubbing my nose against the glass of it—it stood in my father's study—and wondering how on earth people could write so many books. That was the time when I thought the world ended at the high wall round the gas-works. Shabby—that book-case! Why, it's magnificent! As I look at it now, all my dreams come back to me—and what finer furniture can you have in a room than dreams? Then there's that sideboard. I daresay you'll call it Early Victorian—I don't mind! I am Early Victorian—and, let me tell you, a very good time it was, too. My mother was fond of that sideboard, and I was fond of my mother—I like to think of her now. Besides, do you know the especial charm of this room? No one ever comes into it, but me. No housemaid dare set her foot in the place—I dust it myself, and sweep it—look at the broom in the corner—oh, not very well, perhaps, but I don't mind a little dust—and here in this room I'm alone, and that's the great thing.—Do you know, you're the third

person that has been in it, these ten years—and you'll never come here again.

Hanks. Oh, duke—don't say that!

Duke. [*Firmly.*] Never. The reward of good conduct to-day—and the only reward I have to offer. Because I'll confess to you that I'm very fond of little Miss Margaret—I like her, I do, very much, very much indeed—and I'm glad she's to marry my boy—and you've done a fine thing—you've stood on tiptoe and looked over the wall of your prejudice—which is *very* uncommon, friend Hanks.

Hanks. Well, duke, I like her, too. I was born a Non-conformist just as you were born a duke.

Duke. Labels. Like my parrot—*psittacus minor macrovius*.

Hanks. I've had a very hard life—no bookcase for me to rub my nose against—first thing I recollect was rubbing my back, when my father had used his strap.

Duke. My old dad had a cane, and I remember my poor mother crying . . .

Hanks. Mine didn't cry—she used to practise on me, herself, with a slipper. But she meant very well. We *were* so poor! I worked from the time I could walk. And my wife—my one bit of happiness, duke—she died when Alicia was born. We'd only been married a year. So I've a soft side in my heart, when I see young people in love.

Duke. I'll amend my rule, friend Hanks—you shall come in here once a year; and I'll sit on the ladder, and you shall have the chair with four legs, and talk to me of your wife, while I tell tales about the sideboard and bookcase. There—that's a bargain! Now we must bustle—the canaries are getting impatient—they want the sun, too! [*He gets up.*] Would you mind? Thank you—I'll hand them down. [*He takes two cages from the hooks, and gives them to HANKS.*] Here are Coriolanus and Semolina. Put them out.

Hanks. [*Laughing, as he takes the cages and goes off with them.*] The names you've given 'em!

Duke. Little birds like big names. [*He takes down the last cage, in which is the starling.*] Ah, little friend, so quiet to-day? So frightened, because there's a strange man in the room? Come along—I'll take *you* out myself. [*To HANKS, as*

he returns.] This is my starling—and my favourite of the all. [*He carries the cage into the sunshine.*] There—your corner. Now be happy!

[*He returns.* HANKS is staring at the box.]

Duke. [*Taking his coat and putting it on.*] A very fashioned lot in there—nothing new, nothing new. But read them again and again. Sit down, won't you? [*HANKS takes a chair.*] That chair has only three legs. [*He pushes the armchair forward.*] This one's all right.

Hanks. [*Remorsefully.*] Oh, duke, if I'd known—

Duke. [*Quickly.*] I'll never have anything touched in here—never. I'll see to that leg myself, sometime. That's a lathe in the corner—I can make things. I've made all those hutches myself. You're looking at the little ones on the shelf? They're for baby thrushes, that have fallen out of their nest.

Hanks. I wonder you haven't any dogs.

Duke. Dogs die, you know.

Hanks. Well, so do the birds.

Duke. One's fond of birds, but one loves his dogs. . . . They're buried out there, in a row. I'm too old to have any more; I couldn't go through it again. Animals are quite a passion with me. Of course it's foolish.

Hanks. [*Stoutly.*] Not a bit! Why?

Duke. I'm afraid it weakens one's interest in human beings. But then, what can I do in the world? I'm only a bit of wreckage.

Hanks. Duke! Don't talk like that.

Duke. You have your thirty shops, and your thousand employees.

Hanks. Twelve hundred and fifty. Yes. I'm proud of it.

Duke. You've every right to be. Sit down, won't you? You needn't be uneasy—that chair's sound.

Hanks. And how about you?

Duke. I'll take this one with three legs—I can sit on it all right. [*He sits, as does HANKS.*] Merely a matter of adapting oneself to circumstance—which is what I've been doing, more or less, all my life. [*He produces his cigar-case.*]

Here, have a cigar. Don't be afraid of them—they're your own.

Hanks. [Laughing as he takes one.] I'm glad you've got something of mine in here, Duke!

Duke. I am a man with my eyes fixed. As I eat your food and drink your wine, it seems unreasonable to me not to smoke your cigars, and I do: I smoke a good many.

[He strikes a match, which he hands to Hanks.]

Hanks. [Taking the match and lighting his cigar.] Thank you. They are good, though I say it. We're a first-class man in the cigar department—No. 35—he started as an errand-boy—they made of him this. If you know, Duke, all those people of mine look on me as a friend—and I am, too.

Duke. You're a good fellow—and a clever fellow—and you ought to be a Cabinet Minister—and there's more than one Cabinet Minister who'd be much better employed at No. 35, choosing cigars. But that's their trouble. [He takes the match Hanks hands him.] We'll smoke. [He lights his cigar.]

Hanks. [Modestly.] I'm an organizer, of course.

Duke. But you're not an orator. In your business the orators become shopwalkers—in the Government business—But we needn't worry. Mr. Hanks, I hate worry. And I'm feeling very happy to-day. Roland and Margaret are going to be married—and I'm thoroughly enjoying this cigar. There's not a cloud on my horizon—the sky is perfectly blue—and your man at No. 35 really understands his business.

Hanks. Best judge of tobacco in London—and I'll tell him what you say. He'll be awfully pleased.

Duke. Tell him by all means. And you may add that, if I were King, I'd make him a Knight of the Amber Mouth-piece. . . . Do you hear my birds out there—they're beginning to talk. That's Esmeralda's voice—what is it she's saying?—Hullo—they've stopped—I wonder—

[He half turns in his chair, listening; MARGARET and ALMA burst into the room, through the French windows.]

Duke. [Rising, in absolute dismay and amazement.] Oh!!!

Margaret. [Going eagerly to him.] Duke——

Duke. [Waving her back, very plaintive and annoyed.] My dear Miss Verrall—Alma, you know very well——

Margaret. [Insisting feverishly, laying a hand on his arm.] Duke——

Duke. [Fretfully.] No one ever comes here—it's Alma's fault—she should have told you——

Margaret. Duke, I beg of you——

Duke. [Stopping her, and trying to lead her to the door.] In any other place, and at any other time, I am heartily at your service.

Margaret. [Firmly, refusing to budge.] There can be no other time, Duke, and no other place. You must hear us now.

Hanks. [Shocked.] Must! My dear Miss Verrall!

Duke. [With a shrug.] One cannot contradict ladies. But I am not pleased. Alma——[He turns reproachfully to her—MARILLIER comes rushing into the room; the DUKE faces him angrily.] Mr. Marillier! May I ask——

Marillier. [Panting.] Excuse me—I had to—because——

Margaret. Duke, duke, Alma must not marry this man!

Duke } [In amazement.] What!
Hanks. }

Marillier. [Frantically, to MARGARET.] Remember!

Margaret. [To the DUKE, brushing MARILLIER away.] And we've come to you——

Duke. [Stopping her] Hush—please. I don't understand. What does all this mean? [To MARILLIER.] Perhaps you can explain?

Marillier. [Growling.] Some mad freak of Miss Verrall's——

Hanks. [Trying to buttonhole MARGARET.] My dear Miss Verrall—really——

Margaret. [Both hands out to the DUKE.] Duke—duke——

Duke. Alas! Trouble! Storms and disturbance! Chaos and earthquakes! At least not in this room. We'll go——

[He moves to the door at L.

Margaret. [Interposing, firmly.] No! In this room—the room that is yours—where you are master!

Duke. [Resentfully.] Miss Verrall!

Margaret. O duke, forgive me! But it *must* be!

Hanks. [*Full of reproach.*] That is scarcely the way—I must really remind you——

Duke. [*Turning to HANKS.*] Mr. Hanks, as you see, I am taken possession of, and my room invaded. We must resign ourselves! But it is at least fitting and proper that Alicia should be present and hear what has to be said. [*To MARGARET, with mild irony.*] You will—graciously—permit that?

Margaret. [*Slowly, with hesitation.*] If you—insist—though I'd rather—I've only two words——

Duke. [*Stopping her.*] Please defer saying them till Lady Studland has come. Mr. Hanks, would you mind——?

Hanks. Certainly. Shall I bring her in here?

Duke. Since such are Miss Verrall's—commands. [*HANKS goes through the French windows.*] Now, please, till Lady Studland comes—not a word—no—not a word! Will you be seated?

Margaret. [*Holding ALMA to her.*] No, no——

Duke. Mr. Marillier——[*He motions him to a chair.*] The seating accommodation, I am afraid, is limited.

Marillier. [*Going to him.*] Duke, I wish to tell you that I am absolutely at a loss——

[*HANKS has gone through the windows; and at this moment the sound is heard of a cage being overturned, followed by the sharp cry of a parrot.*]

Duke. [*Fretfully.*] Tut, tut, he has kicked over one of the cages—very careless, very. You must excuse me—my birds are out there.

[*He goes hurriedly, and is heard talking to the birds outside. MARILLIER stalks threateningly to MARGARET.*]

Marillier. [*In a savage whisper.*] You realize what you are doing?

Margaret. [*Clasping ALMA tighter, and speaking over her shoulder.*] Yes. . . .

Marillier. Are you mad? Do you think I'll allow you——

Margaret. Look at this child—look!

Marillier. [*Trying to take ALMA's hand.*] Alma—Alma——

Alma. [*Clinging to MARGARET.*] No—I can't—I can't!

Margaret. You see! Oh, I appeal to you! To whatever is good in you!

Marillier. Think of yourself, you fool!

Margaret. I tried—I did—I tried——

Marillier. If you say a word—as God hears me—I'll tell . . . Get us out of this scrape. If you don't——

[*Voices are heard outside—he stops. The DUKE is saying, "Yes—you're all to come in—oh, you mustn't ask me! No, my dear Hanks—the bird wasn't hurt—only frightened, that's all." ALICIA is heard saying, "Most incomprehensible! sent for us? Why?" She comes in, followed by HANKS and the DUKE; with GEOFFREY and ROLAND after them. ROLAND goes eagerly to MARGARET.*

Roland. Why, Maggie!

[*She gives a startled glance at him; then her eyes travel back to ALMA and MARILLIER, who stands relentlessly by her side, muttering threats under his breath.*

Roland. Maggie! What is it?

Alicia. [*In mild amazement.*] My dear Margaret! we saw you and Alma tearing across the lawn——

Duke. [*Placing a chair for ALICIA, in which she sits.*] Something has happened.

Alicia. [*Looking from one to the other.*] Happened? What can have happened? Won't someone speak?

[*There is silence; MARGARET, terrorised by MARILLIER, stands irresolute, almost trembling. A movement from ALMA, a whisper, gives her strength, courage. She leaves the girl and moves swiftly to ALICIA.*

Margaret. Alicia, Alicia, she mustn't marry—Mr. Marillier!

[*There is a general stir: GEOFFREY steps stolidly in front of MARILLIER, who was about to rush up to MARGARET; he growls, from behind GEOFFREY, "Take care!"*

Margaret. She doesn't love him—it would be an error.

Alicia. [Annoyed and indignant.] My dear Margaret, have you taken leave of your senses? Do you know what you are saying?

Geoffrey. [Smiling and looking at *you* of *MARGARET*.] Let her speak.

Alicia. [With an angry look of the least intention.] Geoffrey!

Geoffrey. [Dispassionately.] I say, let her speak. Give her a chance.

Alicia. You will be good enough not to interfere.

Geoffrey. Alas, happens to be my sister. And Roland and I both know—

Roland. Yes, yes—he's quite right!

Geoffrey. And it's time someone said something and put an end to it! Go on, Miss Verrall.

Hanka. [Leaving the DUKE and going to GEOFFREY.] Really, my dear Geoffrey, you mustn't—

Alicia. Don't trouble, father! Geoffrey is right, of course, to say something unpleasant—and what does he care if it isn't true? As of course it isn't! [She turns to MARGARET.] My dear Margaret, what does this mean? I left you, an hour ago—

Margaret. [Almost in a wall.] And I tried—I did—I tried!

Alicia. [Sourly.] What do you mean—you tried? Oh, please let us be calm, and not make a scene. [She turns to the DUKE.] Duke, don't you think some of us might—

Duke. [Quietly.] I am simply obeying Miss Verrall's orders.

Alicia. [With a haughty stare at MARGARET.] Miss Verrall's orders!

Margaret. [Crushed, feebly.] I—I—I asked—I wanted—

Marillier. [Eluding GEOFFREY and stepping forward.] The fact is, Lady Studland—and it explains everything—Miss Verrall is somewhat hysterical—

Roland. [Fiercely, with an angry movement towards him.] How dare you say that!

[ALMA, when ROLAND leaves her, creeps to MAR-

GARET again; GEOFFREY interposes between
ROLAND and MARILLIER.

Geoffrey. Steady, Roland. Be quiet.

Roland. [*With a growl.*] I won't allow anyone——

Alicia. Roland, Roland, don't be so silly! If it isn't hysteria, it's—Miss Verrall, really! We had a long talk this morning. If you had anything to say——

Margaret. [*With a great effort.*] Since our talk I've been with Alma—and I've seen so plainly that she's—not happy——

Alicia. [*Raising her hands, as she sinks back into her chair.*] Not happy! Didn't I——

Marillier. [*Again dodging GEOFFREY.*] The fact is, Lady Studland——

[*GEOFFREY quietly gets in front of MARILLIER again, and keeps him back.*]

Geoffrey. It's quite true. She isn't. She has told me.

Roland. [*With an angry look at MARILLIER.*] And me. Again and again.

Duke. [*Bewildered, behind ALICIA's chair.*] I've never heard a word!

Hanks. [*Bustling round to ALICIA.*] Surely, my dear Alicia, if that is the case——

Alicia. [*Indignantly.*] Father, how can you! What are you thinking of? Alma, of her own free will, engaged herself to Mr. Marillier.

Geoffrey. She didn't. You made her.

Alicia. [*Angrily.*] Geoffrey!

Geoffrey. That's the fact. You did. And we've none of us had the pluck. It's fine of Miss Verrall.

Roland. [*Eagerly.*] Yes, yes. It is.

[*MARILLIER wants to speak, but GEOFFREY stops him; there is muffled conversation between them at the back of the room, GEOFFREY evidently insisting upon his remaining silent.*]

Alicia. [*Ignoring ROLAND, and addressing GEOFFREY over her shoulder.*] Your remarks, my dear Geoffrey, are not to the point, nor are they in the slightest degree true. I used such influence as I possess, that I freely admit, because I

regarded, and do still regard, Mr. Marillier as the ideal husband for Alma. In that view I had my father's concurrence—and yours, duke, did I not?

Duke. [*Sorely puzzled.*] All I know is that I told Alma she was free to do as she pleased—and that she consented.

Alicia. [*Triumphantly.*] Perfectly—what more need be said? My dear Margaret, kindly release Alma. Believe me, she is in no need of protection. Alma, come here—come to me, please. [*ALMA moves slowly towards her, her eyes fixed on the ground.*] You know that we have talked this matter over again and again. You consented—you freely consented. One must not be too unreasonably capricious. Have you altered your mind? Do you want to break off your engagement? If so, why? Give us your reasons. Tell us what has happened—to bring about this sudden change.

[*She has placed a hand on ALMA's arm, and looks harshly and searchingly at her; the girl stands before her, breathing quickly, not daring to look up, unable to speak. MARGARET is making a movement towards her, when MARILLIER bends forward and whispers in her ear; she gives a startled glance at him, and stops, irresolute.*

Geoffrey. Speak up, Alma!

Roland. Yes, yes! Tell them!

Alicia. Geoffrey, and you, Roland, please do not interfere. There has been too much interference already. [*With a reproachful glance at MARGARET.*] If it hadn't been for that—[*She turns to ALMA again.*] Well, Alma? You are at liberty to break your word, if you choose, and inflict this insult upon Mr. Marillier, this gentleman who believed in your word, as we did. Well? We are waiting, Alma? You have nothing to say? [*The girl remains unhappily silent, too cowed to dare utter a word; ALICIA turns triumphantly to the others.*] You see? As for you, my dear Margaret, I am surprised that, after what I said to you—But, in any event—(*she rises, and pushes back her chair*) this meeting—may now break up.

Geoffrey. With a vote of thanks to the chairman!

Alicia. [*Still with a hand on ALMA's arm.*] Please don't practise your humour on me, Geoffrey—you'd much better try

it in the House, instead of going to sleep there! Duke, I'm sorry to have invaded your privacy—but it has not been *my* doing. We will leave you. Come, father—Mr. Marillier——

[She wheels to the door, leading ALMA, followed by MARILLIER. MARGARET stands, dumb and shaken. As ALMA is going, she raises her head and flashes a quick glance at MARGARET—a glance of such appeal—the girl looks so unhappy and disconsolate—that MARGARET, obeying a sudden, irresistible impulse, springs forward.]

Margaret. *[With a loud cry.]* No!

[The group at the door stop; ALICIA draws herself to her full height—an insulted Juno.]

Alicia. *[Witheringly.]* You are giving *me* orders? I am not to go?

Margaret. *[Recklessly.]* No! Duke, duke, that poor girl stands there, tongue-tied—but I've seen it, I've seen it——

Alicia. *[Angrily, stamping her foot.]* What have you seen? What?

Hanks. *[Deprecatingly.]* Really, my dear Miss Verrall!

Roland. *[Plucking at her sleeve.]* Maggie—Maggie—I say——

Margaret. No, no! You regard her silence as consent! It isn't! it isn't! She can't speak, that's all—but look at her! She has told me——

Marillier. *[Breaking from the group at back, losing all control.]* What you wanted her to tell, that's all! Because *you* hate me, you imagine that she——

Alicia. *[Amazed, releasing ALMA, and stepping forward.]* Miss Verrall hates you! Why? Why should she hate you? I thought you were friends? *[MARGARET looks at her, moves her head slowly from one to the other, but makes no reply.]* Roland, I had it from you that Miss Verrall and Mr. Marillier were friends.

Roland. *[Sorely puzzled.]* Yes—I understood—Maggie, tell us . . .

Margaret. *[Feverishly.]* I can't help it—whatever it cost! She is being forced into this!

Alicia. [Turning.] Filled by whom? Please let me know—by whom?

Geoffrey. Someone you let her trust & surrender to me—

Alicia. [Hesitating.] No, I don't know—

Hanks. Really, my dear Geoffrey, this is serious—

Geoffrey. [Turning to the Duke.] Please let me tell you your room. Miss Verrall has something to say. Don't you think she should be allowed to say a word in this situation?

Roland. [By Geoffrey's side.] Yes, yes—that is what we want. Then—

Duke. [Turning.] By all means—and let Geoffrey & Hanks get this over! Alicia, please [Margaret approaches.] Tell Mr. Marillier—let Miss Verrall speak—and speak up—and finish. That is surely the only way of putting an end to this unfortunate scene.

Hanks. With all deference, I think—

Alicia. [Very much distressed.] Don't interrupt further. Since the Duke refuses to believe me—

Duke. [With almost painful gentleness.] My dear Alicia, I refuse to believe no more. This is all very interesting. Now Miss Verrall—please.

Marillier. [By Alicia's side, turning.] Before she begins, I would like to—

Duke. [Firmly.] No, Mr. Marillier—we will hear you later, if you wish it. I assure you, you have all my sympathy.

Alicia. And mine!

Duke. [Turning to Margaret.] Now, Miss Verrall—

Marillier. [To Margaret, reproachfully, whispering.] Remember!

Alicia. [Turning to him.] What is she to remember? What do you mean?

Marillier. [Sullenly.] She knows what I mean.

Alicia. [Suspiciously, as she looks from Marillier to Margaret.] There is something in this I don't understand.

Roland. [Violently, turning threateningly to Marillier.] I won't have this—I won't allow you to—

[Geoffrey pulls him back, and talks to him.]

Duke. [Reprovingly.] Roland, Roland! Mr. Marillier is

naturally disturbed—who wouldn't be? But I must request him to be silent also. Now, Miss Verrall.

[MARGARET stands, a prey to conflicting emotions.
She stares haggardly at them.]

Alicia. [*Harshly.*] We are waiting.

Margaret. [*Slowly, picking her words.*] I am very fond of Alma—she has grown to like me—I am very fond of her—and she has told me—confided in me . . . She is very shy, very timid—she has told me more than she would to anyone else.

Alicia. [*With an angry sneer.*] You have known her two days!

Margaret. [*After a frightened glance at ALICIA.*] At first I thought, like you, that her—aversion to—this man—

Alicia. [*Indignantly.*] This man!

Marillier. [*Frantic.*] Miss Verrall!

[GEOFFREY gets in front of him, and prevents him from interfering.]

Duke. 'Sh, please! Let her finish.

Margaret. [*After another startled glance.*] That her—aversion—was mere—girlish caprice. . . . And I reasoned with her—even rebuked her . . . Because I was anxious to do—what pleased you all . . . But when she said that she . . . prayed every night . . . to be . . . released from him . . .

Marillier. [*Almost struggling with GEOFFREY.*] A lie, a lie!

Roland. [*Frantic with rage.*] Mr. Marillier!

Duke. [*To MARILLIER.*] Really, I cannot permit—

[ALICIA goes to MARILLIER, and whispers to him.]

Margaret. [*Still faintly and timidly, with immense effort.*] That . . . when he touched her, she . . . shrank from him . . . I . . . didn't believe it at first . . . I thought, just like you, that, had that been true, she would have . . . broken it off, long ago. . . . So I did what I could—oh, I did! . . . and when he came . . . she had run away, hidden . . . it was I brought her back . . . and I told her she was wrong . . . and I made her stay . . . and was leaving her with him . . . when . . . he took her hand . . . and wanted to kiss her . . . and she, the poor child, she tried to submit . . . I saw her eyes close,

I saw her shiver . . . but . . . as his lips drew near . . . she shrieked, and ran from him, ran to me!

[*All, except ALICIA and MARILLIER, are shocked and startled.*]

Alicia. [*Roughly.*] Nonsense!

Margaret. [*Suddenly bursting forth, passionately.*] No—it wasn't! It was physical aversion—the blood refusing—it was pain, torture, torment—it was FEAR! And I saw it—I saw it, I tell you! Alma —[*she makes a swift movement to her*] Alma! isn't this true?

Alma. [*Breaking down, and crying.*] Yes, oh yes! It is!

[*The DUKE goes to ALMA, and draws her tenderly towards him.*]

Duke. My poor child, my poor child! This engagement makes you—very unhappy?

Alma. Yes, father—yes—it does!

[*The DUKE releases her—she runs to MARGARET, who soothes and caresses her.*]

Duke. [*Gently, but firmly.*] Mr. Marillier, I offer you every apology, every sincerest regret—but must ask you to release my daughter.

Alicia. [*Almost in a shriek.*] Duke! we haven't heard——

Duke. Pardon me, we have heard. And I, as Alma's father——

Marillier. [*Madly.*] I won't!

[*An exclamation from GEOFFREY and ROLAND.*]

Hanks. But surely, Mr. Marillier——

Marillier. [*Shaking him off.*] I won't! You mustn't believe this trumped-up story—it's lies—nothing but lies! She has worked upon Alma—that's what it is—and that's all. She hates me, because I treated her badly years ago—and because of that——

Alicia. [*Quickly.*] You treated her badly! What do you mean?

Roland. [*Horribly excited, menacingly.*] Yes—what, what?

[*MARILLIER stares stupidly—the words had fallen from him—he hadn't intended to speak them. GEOFFREY has rejoined ROLAND, and pulled him away. MARGARET stands motionless, her head*]

erect, her arms round ALMA: she quietly leans towards her, and kisses the girl on the brow. MARILLIER gnaws his moustache, stares at the ground, and says nothing. There is a moment of painful silence.

Alicia. [Going close to him.] What do you mean, Mr. Marillier?

Marillier. [Mumbling.] I don't want to say any more.

Roland. [White and threatening.] You must! You must!

Alicia. [Grimly.] Do you mean to imply that there was any—relation——

Roland. Alicia!

Alicia. [Ignoring him.] Between you—and Miss Verrall?

Marillier. [Savagely, his fury again getting the better of him.] Yes—there was! [He turns to MARGARET.] I warned you! [Fiercely, to the others.] There was! There was!

[ROLAND staggers, and would have fallen, but for GEOFFREY. He shrieks out, "Maggie, Maggie!"

Margaret. [Raising her head, proudly, and facing MARILLIER.] Yes. There was. Let him go on, and tell you—all.

[There is a moment's dead silence, broken only by ROLAND, who is muttering curses and threats, and endeavouring to pass GEOFFREY, who is holding him back. MARILLIER, his passion spent, stands grim and silent, abashed. The DUKE and HANKS are too distressed and startled to speak.

Alicia. [Coldly.] Alma, come here.

Alma. [Tightening her clasp of MARGARET.] No, no!

Alicia. [Commandingly.] Come, I tell you.

Margaret. Go, dear Alma.

[She herself unclasps the girl's arms; ALMA kisses her feverishly, then moves slowly to ALICIA, who waves her to the other side of her.

Alicia. And now Miss Verrall will be good enough——

Duke. [Interposing.] One moment. How long ago did these things happen, Mr. Marillier?

Marillier. [Sullenly, still not looking up.] Twelve years.

Duke. You say you treated Miss Verrall badly?

Marillier. Well, that 's true—I did. But I was a youngster, and hadn't—

Duke. [*Stopping him with a gesture.*] You used the word “warn.” I heard you say you had “warned” Miss Verrall. May I ask, of what?

Marillier. [*Lifting his head, dazed.*] Of what?

Duke. Yes—of what? What warning was this? What was its nature? And *why* did you warn her?

[*MARILLIER stares stupidly at him, but says nothing.*

Duke. Can it be that you proposed a—bargain? That if she—helped you with Alma, concealed the truth from us, you would keep *her* secret? But, if she didn't—

Alicia. [*Breaking in angrily.*] What makes you suppose—

Duke. Mr. Marillier knew Miss Verrall was here; when I met him this morning, he told me how glad he would be to see her again. [*To MARILLIER.*] Did you not?

Marillier. [*Doggedly.*] I did.

Duke. You warned her, therefore, that if she tried to save my daughter from this marriage, into which she was being forced by her father and her family—

Alicia. [*Indignantly.*] Duke!

Duke. [*Absolutely disregarding her.*] That if she interfered to stop this—crime, you would tell? [*There is a pause; MARILLIER hangs his head, and is silent.*] That was not well done, Mr. Marillier.

Alicia. You will allow me to differ. We owe Mr. Marillier a debt of gratitude for revealing this woman's character to us.

Duke. Had he considered such a revelation necessary, he would have made it when he first heard that Miss Verrall was here. Mr. Marillier, we need not detain you.

Alicia. [*Stepping forward, furiously.*] Duke, I will not permit—

Duke. [*Again totally disregarding her, addressing MARILLIER.*] As Alma's father, I break off my daughter's engagement, and as the master and head of this house, I request Mr. Marillier to withdraw from it.

Marillier. . . . Before I go . . . I'd like to say that . . . I'm

sorry . . . I said anything . . . I hadn't intended . . . I've behaved like a . . . blackguard to her . . . for the second time . . . I'm sorry. . . .

[*He goes slowly through the door L; ROLAND, who has been with GEOFFREY at the back of the room, GEOFFREY keeping him from flying at MARILLIER, wants to follow him now; the DUKE beckons to him; he comes, and the DUKE keeps him by his side, a hand on ROLAND's arm. The door closes on MARILLIER before a word is spoken. Even ALICIA has been impressed and silenced by the DUKE's attitude. Now she asserts herself again.*]

Alicia. Duke, I will say nothing. This is not the time or place. I am waiting for Miss Verrall to leave us.

Roland. [*Still by his father's side, the DUKE restraining him.*] No, no!

Geoffrey. [*At back.*] That's right, Roland—that's right!

Duke. [*To ROLAND.*] Hush, my boy—hush. . . . [*He turns to MARGARET.*] Has Miss Verrall anything to say?

Margaret. [*Proudly.*] I? What is there for me to say? [*She looks tenderly at ROLAND.*] My poor Roland! I release you, of course——

Roland. No, no—I won't——

Margaret. It must be, dear Roland. . . . But think kindly of me always . . . think of me only as a woman who loved you . . . loved you beyond all other things . . . loved you enough to . . . leave you now. . . . I will go. . . .

Alicia. [*Coldly.*] And the sooner the better.

Margaret. [*Stopping in her movement towards the door, turning fiercely on ALICIA, with rising passion.*] The sooner the better—yes. But I tell you this—you who condemn and despise me—I stand here to-day no less innocent than you!

Alicia. [*With a shrug.*] Innocent!

Margaret. Innocent, innocent! I have been sinned against—I have not sinned. I am the victim, not the offender. My life lies behind me, as spotless as your own. Oh, I don't hope to make *you* believe it! But that is the truth—and somewhere, far away from this world, there is a truth—and by *that* let

me be judged! . . . [*She turns.*] Roland—Alma—good-bye! I go.

Duke. [*Still keeping ROLAND back, and anticipating him.*] No.

Alicia. [*Turning fiercely on him.*] Duke!

Duke. Miss Verrall will stay here.

Alicia. [*In sheer amazement.*] What do you say? She has offered to go. Why should we detain—Mr. Marillier's mistress? [*There is an exclamation from all.*]

Duke. [*Warmly.*] A shameful word, Alicia; but the shame does not fall on her! I see before me only a fine and a noble woman—

Margaret. [*Pressing her hands to her heart.*] Duke!

Duke. Who voluntarily, deliberately, sacrificed herself to save a girl whom she scarcely knew, a girl whom her own father, her own family, refused to help. And the consent I gave this morning is doubly ratified now; and I shall be proud to call Margaret my daughter.

Geoffrey. Bravo, gov'nor—bravo!

Alicia. [*Wildly.*] But this is delirium, madness! Admit a woman into our family who—Father! Have you heard? Why don't you say anything? Is everyone mad? Am I to have a—fallen woman—as my sister-in-law?

Duke. [*Angrily.*] Alicia!

Alicia. What else? That's the fact, is it not? You've lived so long out of the world, with your owls and monkeys—

Hanks. [*Appalled.*] Alicia!

Alicia. [*Disregarding him.*] That you've forgotten the meaning of things. Do you realize what people would say?

Duke. [*Quietly.*] I do.

Alicia. And in spite of all that! [*She throws up her hands.*] In Heaven's name, tell me where you've picked up such monstrous ideas!

Duke. From a few words, spoken on a mountain, nineteen hundred years ago. . . .

[*There is silence: for a moment even ALICIA is staggered, but for a moment only.*]

Alicia. Very well then: it is for me to act—for me and my father. This is no time for mincing matters. Either Miss Verrall leaves this house, or we do.

Duke. Miss Verrall shall leave this house—but I will with her—with my son and daughter.

Hanks. [*Aghast.*] Duke!

Duke. [*Turning to him, gently.*] Don't be troubled, friend! This had to come.

Hanks. [*In great distress.*] But——

[ALICIA, by his side, stops him rough——

Alicia. [*To the DUKE.*] That is your last word?

Duke. Yes.

Alicia. Very well then. Father—come!

Hanks. [*Turning from one to the other, in the direst perplexity.*] But—Alicia——

Alicia. Come!

[*She takes him by the arm, and almost drags him off through the door at L.*

Margaret. [*Going eagerly to the DUKE and ROLAND, her joy bursting every barrier.*] O Duke! Duke, I'm on my knees to you! Oh, what you've done to-day! I've no words—I can't tell you—[*She turns to ROLAND.*] Roland, dear Roland! [*ALMA comes to her—she takes the girl's hand.*] Alma, Alma! Alma, we shall all be happy now! But—Duke! Oh, it is wonderful—I could never have believed! . . . Roland, now all has happened as we really wanted—your father consents, and he will be my father, too—and Alma, our little Alma—oh, the thanks in my heart, the joy!

[*She buries her head on ALMA's shoulder.*

Alma. [*Eagerly, to the DUKE.*] We're all of us going?

Duke. Except Geoffrey. He must stay here.

Geoffrey. [*Mournfully.*] And a nice time I'm going to have of it!

Margaret. Poor Geoffrey! But, duke—are you sure? Are you quite sure? Will you never be sorry? But no—why need I ask? You and Roland, you've done this together. It has not touched his love for me—Roland, dear Roland!—and you are beginning to love me. Oh, the great happiness! Let us go—let us go quickly—come!

[*With the DUKE and ALMA, closely followed by ROLAND, she goes through the French windows.*

As ROLAND passes GEOFFREY, he grips

GEOFFREY'S arm, and staggers against the wood-work, letting the others, who have not noticed, pass on.

Geoffrey. [Turning anxiously to him.] Why, Roland!

Roland. [Hoarsely.] O Geoff, Geoff—I thought her the type of all that was pure and holy—I thought her a Saint!

Geoffrey. [Staring, aghast.] Roland!

Roland. [Getting unsteadily to his feet, and pulling himself together.] It's all right—I'll go through with it—I'll marry her. And she never shall know. But it's hard—oh, it's hard!

[MARGARET has gone on a few paces with the others, she turns to see ROLAND, and comes back to him, beaming with joy, both hands outstretched.

Margaret. Roland, dear Roland, come! [She takes his hands in hers.] Only happiness before us now—happiness, happiness! Come!

[The curtain falls as he goes with her through the French windows.

CURTAIN.

ACT IV.

The scene is the same as Act I.

MRS. PETHICK *is seated at her small table, knitting. She is excited, and keeps on looking at the clock. Suddenly MARGARET bursts in tempestuously, wearing hat and cloak. She rushes at MRS. PETHICK, who has started to her feet, letting her knitting fall to the ground, and hugs her.*

Mrs. Pethick. [Breathlessly.] Maggie! Well?

Margaret. Splendid! You got my wire?

Mrs. Pethick. Yes. Tell me.

Margaret. No time. The Duke's with me—he's paying the cab.

Mrs. Pethick. [Gasping.] The Duke!

Margaret. Yes. He's come to see you, and thank you.

Mrs. Pethick. Thank me!

Margaret. For the help you gave me twelve years ago. And I bless you for it again to-day.

Mrs. Pethick. [Eagerly.] Then——

Margaret. [Nodding.] Yes—they know—and it makes no difference. I had to tell them, to save the girl—and they love me the more for it. Miracles!

Mrs. Pethick. [Hugging her, wild with joy.] Maggie!

Margaret. It's beyond words, beyond everything. Lucy, Lucy, I'm happy!

[She kisses her again: the DUKE comes in, escorted by WILSON.]

Wilson. [Pompously.] His Grace the Duke of——

Duke. [*Stopping her.*] That's all right—I don't think you need announce me. [WILSON goes.]

Margaret. Duke, this is Mrs. Pethick.

[MRS. PETHICK is about to drop a deep curtsey: the DUKE stops her and goes to her.]

Duke. Mrs. Pethick, I have heard about you—Margaret has told me. And I am very glad to have this opportunity of thanking you myself.

Mrs. Pethick. [*Staring vaguely, not knowing what to say.*] Sir . . .

Margaret. [*Chuckling.*] First time I've known her at a loss for words! Duke, I'll just take off my hat. I'll be back in a minute.

[*She goes. MRS. PETHICK stands, fearfully embarrassed, shifting from one foot to the other.*]

Duke. [*Smiling benevolently at her.*] Shall we sit, Mrs. Pethick? And please don't let my title alarm you. The stable-boys in the country call me Old Rubyface.

Mrs. Pethick. [*Indignantly.*] The impudence!

Duke. Behind my back, of course—but I've heard them—and I confess I don't like it. It suggests—vaguely—intemperance. Whereas the ruddy hue of my complexion is due to a variety of causes, of which not one is connected with the bottle. Please believe it, Mrs. Pethick.

Mrs. Pethick. [*Not knowing what to say.*] Sir . . .

Duke. Shall we sit? [*She drops on to the edge of the sofa—he sits also.*] Thank you. It is of course the ineradicable habit of mankind to indulge in nicknames. I feel perfectly certain that Adam and Eve will have had some familiar cognomen for the snake in the Garden of Eden—though this is merely a surmise, and rests on no authority. **Mrs. Pethick,** I am really glad to be able to tell you what a fine thing you did when you helped that friendless girl.

Mrs. Pethick. [*Very embarrassed.*] Sir—I—

Duke. That's all right—I won't embarrass you with phrases—and I know it's odious to be thanked. That's why I think it's more blessed to receive than to give. But I'm very fond of Margaret—very fond indeed. And you're

done what very few people do in this world. Mrs. Pethick, you're a trump!

[MARGARET comes in, having taken off her hat and cloak.

Margaret. That's just what she is—a trump! I make a rhyme to it, sometimes, and call her a frump—but I won't any more. [MRS. PETHICK laughs, and rises.] Sit down, Lucy. You needn't go—we've no secrets—have we, duke?

Mrs. Pethick. [Very happy, her joy struggling through her shyness.] So they know—everything?

Margaret. Everything! And we'll never speak of it any more. We're going to be happy, all of us. [To the DUKE.] Aren't we?

Duke. [Meditatively.] Except my solicitor.

Margaret. Your solicitor?

Duke. That unfortunate man will be called upon to provide me with money. He will have to execute some sub-deputy-assistant mortgage. I believe there are one or two trees that I still have the right to cut down.

Margaret. Oh, don't destroy those splendid old trees!

Duke. I might start a hat-shop.

Margaret. [Laughing.] Duke!

Duke. Since countesses sell dresses, why not a duke hats?

Margaret. Let's have tea. [She rings.] We've been *such* a long time coming, Lucy! The train admired the scenery so much that it insisted on stopping every few minutes to have another look at it.

Mrs. Pethick. But I don't understand. Why have you——

Margaret. [Gaily.] Don't *try* to understand, my dear! It's a bit of a muddle, so far, but will all come right. The irresistible met the immovable—who was the Duke——

[WILSON comes in.

Duke. And the irresistible is on the point of ordering tea.

Margaret. [Laughing.] Tea, Wilson, please. [WILSON goes.

Mrs. Pethick. [Rising.] I'm sure you want to talk. Let me go, please. I'll come back, later. You see, sir—[she turns to the DUKE] I'm very fond of her, too. I'm an old woman, with no one belonging to me, but her.

[*She goes* L. MARGARET intercepts her as she passes, and kisses her affectionately.

Margaret. [*Going to the DUKE and bending over him.*] Oh, duke, I couldn't say much to you in the train, with Roland and Alma there—but now!

Duke. Not a word, not a word! D'you know, I feel like a schoolboy, out for a holiday. Of course, there's the question of ways and means.

Margaret. Don't drag me to earth—don't make me feel sorry just now.

Duke. Sorry—why?

Margaret. Haven't I torn you from your home, from your birds, from all that you care for—plunged you into a very sea of worry?

Duke. On which I shall float, my dear child, like an elderly cork. I assure you I'm not in the least disturbed. I shall continue the amiable habit of a lifetime—and let the other folk worry!

[WILSON come in with tea, which she places on the small table at MARGARET's side.

Margaret. I'm in to no one, Wilson, except Captain Erquen—I wired to him, Duke, too—but to no one else. [*To the DUKE.*] I told Alma to rest this afternoon—the poor girl had gone through a great deal—so Roland won't bring her to-day.—You understand, Wilson? No one but Lord Roland and Captain Erquen.

Wilson. Yes, m'm.

[*She goes.*

Margaret. [*Pouring out tea, to the DUKE.*] Two lumps?

Duke. On ordinary occasions—on holidays three. This is a holiday.

[*She puts in three lumps of sugar, and hands him the cup.*

Margaret. Who would have thought, two days ago, that we should be sitting here, like this?

Duke. And that I should be giving myself three lumps of sugar—always, to me, the reward of good conduct.

Margaret. [*Impulsively.*] Duke, I must say something—or I shall burst! I must tell you—

Duke. Don't! Don't talk about me, at all—I like to do

that myself. And I am wondering, at the moment, what avenue of profitable employment is open to a middle-aged duke?

[*There is an altercation outside—the door is flung violently open, and HANKS bursts into the room.*]

Margaret. } Mr. Hanks!
Duke. }

Wilson. [*Almost crying.*] If you please, m'm, he forced his way in!

Margaret. That's all right, Wilson. [*She goes.*]

Hanks. [*Very excited.*] Yes, I did, I did—I followed you up in the motor—and I've been stopped three times on the road for furious driving, and I'll be fined three times, and have my license endorsed, and my man sent to prison perhaps—and I don't care—I don't!

Duke. [*Stirring his cup.*] Dear old friend, why this hurry?

Hanks. The car's outside—and you're all coming back with me in the car!

Margaret. Mr. Hanks!

Hanks. Back to Dumaray Castle. Yes. Duke, I've had a serious talk with Alicia—and, for the first time in my life, I've told her, pretty straight, that I wouldn't have it.

Duke. By Jove! Did you, though?

Hanks. I and Geoffrey, between us—because it wouldn't do—it wouldn't do at all—no, no, the way she behaved to-day—that was wrong, very wrong, quite inexcusable, quite—and we've put her in her place, me and Geoffrey, we have, with a bang—and she'll stop there in future—oh yes, she will—I'll see to that! And I went to my safe—and I made a bonfire of the mortgages—yes, I did, all of 'em—and, duke, you are the owner again of your property, and can do with it what you please!

Duke. [*Gasping.*] Mr. Hanks!

Hanks. [*Firmly.*] What you please. You've taught me a lesson to-day—and I'm quick at picking up things. [*He turns to MARGARET.*] Miss Verrall—Margaret—I'm an old-fashioned person—and what I heard this morning was a great shock to me—and I won't pretend that it wasn't. But the Duke was right in all that he said to you—and I see,

with him, that there ain't no hard-and-fast laws—and that women are funny things, and that some of the best are the worst—and that's not at all what I mean, or what I'd prepared in the car, coming along, but *you* know what I mean, both of you—and I say, as the Duke said, that you *are* the woman for Roland—and that if you did wrong you've atoned for it all, and more than atoned—and I dare say you never did wrong at all, but that's only my clumsy way of putting it—and, Margaret, you're just going to marry Roland, and marry him from Dumaray Castle—and there's going to be as big a wedding as ever there was in this world. So there!

[Exhausted by his earnestness and his volubility he sinks into a chair and wipes his brow.]

Duke. *[Rising and going to him, laying a hand on his shoulder.]* My friend—my very good friend—as regards Margaret, you've done what I expected of you, and I'll say no more. As regards the mortgages, I need scarcely say that it is quite impossible——

Hanks. *[Stoutly.]* Impossible! Why?

Duke. Of course I cannot accept——

Hanks. *[With feeling.]* Will the Duke not be generous enough to take this present from—the draper?

Duke. *[Protesting.]* My dear Hanks!

Hanks. *[To MARGARET.]* Miss Verrall—Margaret! It's the only way. He mustn't go back there, a sort of visitor in his own house. And Roland and Alma—he can provide for them now. And—and—I'm so fond of him! *[He turns to the DUKE.]* Duke, duke, I'd left it all to you in my will—and if I had died first, it'd have made me happy, when I was in my coffin, to think of you master of the old place again—well, give me the fun of it, while I'm alive!

[The DUKE shakes his head, and is about to speak, when MARGARET intervenes.]

Margaret. Mr. Hanks, in the name of the Duke, and speaking for him, I accept your generous offer.

Duke. *[Very vexed.]* Miss Verrall!

Margaret. *[Turning to him.]* My name is Margaret. *[To HANKS.]* I accept it with gratitude, with respect, and affection—because I, the Duke of St. Edmunds, am a fine man

myself, and am able to appreciate the delicate, noble feeling, that has prompted you to do this—and to do it now.

Hanks. [Eagerly.] I'd have done it years ago, only I know he wouldn't have took it.

Margaret. Well, he *does* take it—and he says to you, Mr. Hanks, I've been silent so far, because of my pride, that came over with the Conqueror, eight hundred years ago—but now my heart, that is seven hundred and fifty years younger, overcomes my pride—and I hold out both hands to you—and say, "Thank you, friend Hanks!"

[She turns to the DUKE, with an appealing glance.

After a moment's struggle with himself, he stretches out his hand to HANKS.

Duke. Thank you, friend Hanks! . . . And thank you, friend Margaret!

Margaret. [Gaily, to HANKS.] And now *you* shall have some tea—and you shall have three lumps of sugar, too!

[She pours out a cup, which she hands to him.

Hanks. [Beaming.] Thank you, my dear. Where are Roland and Alma?

Margaret. At Grosvenor Place—we've told Alma to rest—Roland will be here directly. I fancy I hear his cab stopping—Yes, it is!—Duke, and Mr. Hanks, I'm going to say to you, once and for all, just one thing—and then I've done. You've been . . . beautiful, both of you. . . . And—oh, believe it! you'll never be sorry—you'll never be sorry! *[ROLAND comes in, and stares at seeing HANKS.]* Roland, dear Roland! *[She goes eagerly to him.]* Here's Mr. Hanks—he followed us in the car—and arrived about ten minutes after—

Duke. Owing to the artistic instincts of our train.

Hanks. [Answering inquiring glance, jovially.] Yes, my boy—yes—it's all right—everything's all right!

Roland. [Turning to the DUKE.] Father!

Duke. Margaret will tell you.

Hanks. [Rising and putting down his cup.] Yes—and we'll leave her to tell him! Duke, I want you to come back with me, now, in the car, to Dumaray. Will you?

Duke. But—

Hanks. We'll pick up Alma on our way: and Roland shall

bring Margaret down by the six o'clock train. I don't suppose they'll mind being left alone!

Margaret. But Alicia?

Hanks. You'll have no more trouble with her—I promise you that. And she's sorry—she is, really sorry—she knows that the things she said—well, there's an end of all that—it's ended and done with. [*To the DUKE.*] Duke! will you come?

Duke. Well, after all—why not? What do *you* say, Margaret?

Margaret. Oh, my heart is too full to say anything to whatever you propose but just yes—yes—yes!

Hanks. [*Rubbing his hands.*] Good! Roland, my boy, we'll put dinner back half-an-hour, so as to give you lots of time. [*To MARGARET.*] And if I don't make a speech to-night and propose your health—! Come, duke!

Duke. Yes—we'll go. And, dear Margaret . . . [*He bends over her and kisses her.*] my . . . daughter . . . I am glad!

[*He goes briskly, followed by HANKS.*]

Margaret. [*Her eyes following him.*] The dear old man!

Roland. Amazing! What has happened to Alicia?

Margaret. [*Laughing, and turning to him.*] They've put her in her place, Roland—whatever that may mean—Mr. Hanks and Geoffrey. And Mr. Hanks has burned the mortgages—I didn't know one *could* burn a mortgage, but it seems one can—and your father will be living in his own house again—and all will end happily, just as it does in the fairy-books. Oh, isn't it wonderful!

Roland. [*Gently.*] Yes, dear.

Margaret. And you won't have to give up the Army, or alter your life—because your father will be able to make you an allowance now—and I'll leave the stage, if they want me to—I'll do anything, anything—what is there I could refuse them, after what they've done!

Roland. They've done the right thing—and I'm awfully glad, Maggie dear.

Margaret. [*Sitting and drawing him to her side.*] Like the fairy-books, I said—well, it *is* all like a fairy-story! Two days ago I hadn't seen your father or Alma, or Mr. Hanks—fancy! And now!

Roland. [*With a note of sorrow piercing through, notwithstanding all his endeavours.*] Yes—only two days—only two days. . . .

Margaret. And we're going to be happy—*frightfully* happy! And, Roland, we'll live in the country, won't we?—have a little cottage somewhere——

Roland. Whatever you like, Maggie dear—I'll always do what you want me.

Margaret. [*Playfully.*] I suppose most people say that to each other—*before* they are married—but I think *we* mean it. I think we're different. But then I suppose that's what *they* think too!

[*MRS. PETHICK pops in her head from the door at left; then, murmuring "Oh, I'm sorry," wants to go back again.*

Margaret. No, no—come in, Lucy—say something to Roland.

Mrs. Pethick. [*Awkwardly.*] Your lordship, I'm very——

Roland. Don't lordship me, Mrs. Pethick. We've heard about you—and we're all very grateful.

Margaret. There, Lucy! And now say something nice to him!

Mrs. Pethick. [*Still on the threshold.*] You can tease me to-day as much as ever you like! But I'll leave you—I thought you were alone. [*She goes.*

Margaret. She's so pleased, the dear old lady! [*She nestles close to Roland, and half closes her eyes.*] Roland! Tell me!

Roland. [*Gently.*] What shall I tell you, Maggie?

Margaret. I feel as though I had been in the sea, alone, for hours, fighting the waves, drowning. The sea waiting to swallow me . . .

Roland. [*Stroking her hair.*] Poor Maggie!

Margaret. You rescued me—you jumped in and saved me. You love me . . . you love me . . .

Roland. [*Still very gently.*] . . . It's quite wonderful about old Hanks.

Margaret. Everything's wonderful—everything . . . And, Roland, we'll get married very quietly, won't we?—and then we'll have little Alma to stay with us.

Roland. Yes . . . Whatever you like, Maggie, dear . . . I'll always do what you want.

Margaret. [*Raising her head, and menacing him playfully with a forefinger.*] Hé, Monsieur, on verra! You'll be a tyrant, of course, like all husbands—and you'll bully me shockingly—oh yes, you will, with that chin! But I'll be *so* meek! And I'll spend all my time working slippers for you. And I'll be waiting for you, when you come home, and take off your spurs.

Roland. I don't *always* wear spurs, you know, Maggie.

Margaret. [*Nestling against him again.*]

My love is boundless as the sea—

The more I give the more I have . . .

O Roland, I feel as though I were on a cloud, miles above the earth. I feel wild, giddy. I want to shout, and sing—and then to put my head on your shoulder, and cry. I want to tell you all sorts of foolish things—and at the same time I want to be quite silent and merely look at you. I want to laugh and I want to sob. Oh the cynics who say that the world is cruel! I'll send it a testimonial—I'll say I've tried it, I like it, and will use no other . . . Oh, life is good, life is good! Isn't it, Roland.

Roland. . . . And so you have been alone, Maggie, dear, all the time—no family, no friends?

Margaret. Tony and Lucy. Tony, the last four or five years—Lucy, always. Only Lucy and Tony. Acquaintances, of course—oh, lots—but no friends, except those two.

Roland. [*Awkwardly.*] And he . . . loved you, I suppose, Captain Erquen?

Margaret. [*Her head still on his shoulder.*] Tony? Poor Tony! I'm afraid he did . . . I haven't treated him well, poor Tony—I should have sent him away before. . . .

Roland. He wanted you to marry him?

Margaret. Oh yes—but I told him I didn't love him . . . And then *you* came. . . .

Roland. [*Scarcely above a whisper.*] Did he . . . know, Maggie?

Margaret. [*Lifting her head.*] Know?

Roland. Yes . . . about . . .

Margaret. [Quickly.] No, no—no, no—I told him, two days ago—after you—you remember!—after you had . . . No, no—no one knew, no one . . . I didn't myself! It was gone, it never had been . . . And we'll never speak of it—never!

Roland. No, Maggie . . . no . . .

Margaret. [Dropping her head on to his shoulder again.] And we'll grow old together, loving each other. And our love will never change, except to become deeper, and wider, and stronger; and we'll learn so many things together—

Roland. How did you . . . meet him, Maggie?

Margaret. Tony? Oh I—

Roland. No—not Tony. I mean Mr. —

Margaret. [Lifting her head quickly and laying a hand earnestly on his arm.] Hush—he's gone, Roland—he's dead—we're not in the same world, we don't breathe the same air. . . . Don't let's ever speak of him, think of him. He doesn't exist, he never existed—he's only a dream, an illusion. We'll blot him out, Roland.

Roland. [Suddenly losing his self-control.] Oh, if I could!

Margaret. [Terribly startled.] Roland!

Roland. [With a groan, dropping his head into his hands.] If I could! If I could!

Margaret. [Throwing both arms feverishly around him.] Roland—Roland—you're not thinking of him? It hasn't . . . hurt you, Roland?

Roland [Mastering himself with a tremendous effort, and stretching out a hand to her.] No, Maggie . . . no. . . .

Margaret. [Fear creeping over her.] Look at me.

Roland. [Forcing a smile as he lifts his head.] It's all right—I—

Margaret. [Her arms falling from him.] Roland! Roland!
[With a cry of pain.] Oh! [She springs to her feet.]

Roland. [Trying clumsily to comfort her.] It was silly of me to say that . . . I'm a little shaken, of course. . . that's all . . . don't worry, Maggie. . . . [She stands silent, rigid, her eyes fixed on him.] Of course it was . . . just at first . . . don't you know. . . . I mean . . . but it's quite all right, Maggie, dear. . . . And, besides, we must soon . . . [He

takes out his watch.] I say, it's a quarter past five . . . our train goes at six, you know. [*She remains rigid, tense.*] Oh, Maggie, don't! Maggie, what is it? It's a quarter past five—you had better put on your things, hadn't you, Maggie?

Margaret. [*In a dead voice.*] It has made a difference.

Roland. [*Fretfully.*] No, no—not a bit. Don't take things like that—it's really not right, you know. It hasn't changed me.

Margaret. It has.

Roland. [*Eagerly trying to repair his mistake.*] Not a bit, not a bit! Of course, at the start—well, don't you see, it was just as if Alma——

Margaret. Yes.

Roland. That's all. Well—supposing that Alma had suddenly told me—don't you see? And we'll get married just the same——

Margaret. Just the same . . . [*With a cry.*] It's hard—oh, it's hard!

Roland. Maggie, what do you mean? [*He takes her hand; it rests limply in his.*] You don't imagine I'm going to—break it off, do you? I'm not such a——

Margaret. No.

[*She moves from him, both hands pressed to her head.*]

Roland. [*With a sigh of relief, imagining all is well.*] I won't pretend that it didn't . . . hurt me . . . But, as you say, we'll never . . . speak of it again. I say, Maggie, put on your things——

Margaret. [*Turning and facing him, at the far end of the room.*] No.

Roland. Maggie!

Margaret. [*Slowly.*] It has killed your love for me. I see it! It has!

Roland. [*Roughly.*] Nonsense! You shouldn't——

Margaret. If you love me, come here!

[*He tries, manfully enough, to approach her as he used to, with the same smile, the same alertness—she falls back.*]

Margaret. [*Almost with a shriek.*] Like Alma with him! The same look in his eyes! He's afraid of me!

Roland. [Angrily.] Maggie!

Margaret. [Holding out an arm to keep him away.] Don't—don't—don't come near me. . . . Go, Roland! Go!

Roland. [Violently.] Go! You want me to—

Margaret. Yes! What else?

Roland. [Staring stupidly.] Go!

Margaret. For ever—for ever—it's ended—all.

Roland. Do you know what you're saying? You want me to—after everyone has—

Margaret. Yes, the others—they're different. . . . You—I can understand, somehow . . . you find that I'm not . . . the woman you loved . . .

Roland. Maggie, you're making a hideous mistake—yes, you are—I tell you—

Margaret. [With a supreme smile.] Poor Roland . . . you try very hard! Roland, Roland, I know that you're trying! Don't say any more . . . we both of us know . . . Leave me!

Roland. What!

Margaret. Tell your father and Alma—

Roland. [Wildly.] You don't want to see me again!

Margaret. [Steadily.] I don't want to see you again. . . . It has killed your love. . . . You can't help it, Roland—it's not your fault. . . . But I implore you to go. . . . If you have . . . any feeling . . . left for me . . . go . . . go at once . . . at once.

[ROLAND looks at her, amazed, staggered, not knowing what to do or say—shifts from one foot to the other, tries to speak, hesitates; she all the time facing him, her eyes fixed on him, her body almost swaying in her suppressed agony.]

Roland. [Helplessly.] Maggie!

Margaret. Go . . .

[With an inarticulate cry he suddenly flings himself out of the room; she stands there, not moving, her eyes still fixed on the spot where he was; then she goes to a chair, sits, and plays with the pearls of her necklace, too numbed for sensation. ROLAND has left the door open; on the landing he meets

TONY, *who has come up, and they are heard speaking, off.*

Tony. *[Off.]* Hullo, Roland!

Roland. *[Off.]* She has sent me away!

Tony. *[With an exclamation.]* What! What do you say?

Roland. Sent me away—yes! She won't marry me!

Tony. Great Heaven! Why?

Roland. Because I told her that I—Oh, Cap, Cap!

[He breaks down, and rushes down the stairs, out of the house. The bang of the street door is heard as TONY comes into the room.]

Tony. Maggie!

[MARGARET, who has sat motionless since ROLAND left her, turns her head mechanically; then, at the sight of TONY, she gives a sudden dry sob, and speaks brokenly, holding up one hand as though to keep him away.]

Margaret. Not now, Tony. . . . Don't speak to me now. . . .

Tony. *[Too bewildered for words.]* He has—

Margaret. Yes. He doesn't love me any more. It's all over.

Tony. *[Staring at her.]* Maggie!

Margaret. Leave me, Tony, please. Come again in a few days—in a week—

Tony. I can't, Maggie. . . . You forget that I'm sailing on Friday.

Margaret. *[Slowly remembering.]* On Friday—yes—and to-day's Wednesday. The day after to-morrow. *[With a gesture of despair.]* Well, I can't help it!

Tony. Maggie, Maggie, he'll come back!

Margaret. *[Looking stonily at him.]* Why do you say that? It has killed his love—pulled it out by the roots. . . .

Tony. What has happened down there?

Margaret. I had to save the girl, you see—and he told them—but it seemed to make no difference—with the others—and I was so blind—I thought it had made no difference—with him—either. . . . Well, it has . . . it has made . . . all the difference. . . . And . . . think of it! . . . how . . . this thing . . . came about—that didn't matter—he never asked

me a question! If I told my story—the story as God knows it—the very stones would be sorry . . . the stones, but not men. You too, probably! Tony, Tony, what an escape you've had! Good-bye.

Tony. I'll look in to-morrow.

Margaret. Don't. Let's say good-bye now.

Tony. Maggie——

Margaret. Please. Leave me—oh, leave me! Good-bye, Tony!

[She drops a hand, he presses it—pauses, as though to say something, then goes quietly to the door. His hand is on the handle, he is half out of the room, when she suddenly springs up and screams.]

Margaret. Tony!

Tony. *[Coming back.]* Yes?

Margaret. *[Wildly.]* Tony! Don't go!

Tony. What!

Margaret. *[Wringing her hands.]* Don't go—don't go! I'm too lonely; I couldn't stand it—I couldn't! Don't go, Tony!

Tony. *[Gently.]* Dear Maggie, I wanted to stay with you. It was you who——

Margaret. I mean, don't go to India!

Tony. *[With a start.]* What!

Margaret. No. Why should you? You can't leave me like this. You've been so good to me all these years. Tony!

Tony. *[Sadly and reproachfully.]* Maggie, Maggie!

Margaret. Yes, yes, I mean it. Just think, when everything was so happy—everything! . . . You mustn't go, Tony—I couldn't stand it, you know—I really couldn't. You mustn't ask it of me.

Tony. He'll come back, you'll see.

Margaret. Why do you keep on saying that? D'you think I'll drag him to the altar? There was fear in his eyes, I tell you—fear!

Tony. Amazing—inconceivable. . . . I'll look in to-morrow, Maggie. . . .

Margaret. *[Laying a hand on his arm.]* No—not to-morrow—Tell me you'll stay.

Tony. [Gently.] Dear Maggie, how can I? I've accepted this offer——

Margaret. They can send someone else. And you weren't doing it for the money.

Tony. I'd be leaving them in the lurch, you know.

Margaret. A railway! What does it matter! Tony, I want you!

Tony. [Restlessly.] It can't be done, Maggie. . . . I wish I hadn't to go so soon. . . . You know how horribly sorry I am. . . . But you must see for yourself——

Margaret. I don't—I see nothing—except that I won't let you go. . . . The loneliness would be too awful! . . . I've no right to ask it of you, of course——

Tony. [Firmly.] No, Maggie—you *have* no right.

Margaret. But you will—say that you will!

Tony. Would that be fair to me? Maggie, think!

Margaret. [Almost indignantly.] Fair! Have I been treated fairly! And you are the only friend I have in the world, you and Lucy. You must stay, Tony.

Tony. [Firmly, almost fiercely.] No.

Margaret. What! You won't?

Tony. I won't.

Margaret. Tony!

Tony. [Trying to be gentle.] You want me to be the big dog again, as I told you this morning? That's not right, Maggie.

Margaret. [Faintly, pressing her hands to her head.] There's the future—in years to come, perhaps——

Tony. Never. Friendship doesn't lead to love. I've learned that much.

Margaret. Tony, Tony, I know I've treated you badly——

Tony. [With growing anger.] And yet you want me to go through it all over again! Haven't I done enough? Adored you, all these years, asking nothing, waiting, waiting—and then this boy comes along, this callow, insipid, brainless boy——

Margaret. Tony!

Tony. What else? Hasn't he shown it? And you see him two or three times, and fall in love with him—and I can go to India or to the devil——

Margaret. Tony, Tony!

Tony. With your gratitude in my knapsack—the gratitude that has been the hard biscuit I’ve munched the best years of my life. Well, I’ve had enough of it. I want to be loved, too, and have a wife of my own, and a home, and children! I’m tired of being the good, unselfish man, the perfect lover, the saint, the hero! And I tell you I’ll go out to India on Friday, and marry the first pink-faced girl I happen to meet!

Margaret. You’re cruel to me, Tony!

Tony. [*Furious.*] Cruel! You talk of cruelty! You, who told me again and again how much you loved him—told me, *me*—and I was to dance for joy because you were so happy! Well, I did dance, didn’t I? I never reproached you—I just ate my heart, and grinned as though I enjoyed it. And now that you see what he’s worth—now that he drops his absurd little love and bolts like a frightened hare—I am to stop, go back “As you were,” creep into my kennel again, and do my pretty, unselfish tricks till another little fashion-plate comes along. Well, I won’t! And believe me, that’s final! I won’t!

Margaret. I see what it is! This thing has changed you too! yes—that’s the truth!

Tony. [*Savagely.*] Is it? I’ve known it for years!

Margaret. [*Staring at him.*] Tony!

Tony. All except the man’s name—but I knew—oh, never mind how! and it was my great pity for you that made me your friend to begin with.

Margaret. You knew!

Tony. [*Rampant.*] Yes, I tell you—yes. And because of that I was satisfied, at the start, to be your big brother, the noodle who merely fetched and carried—because I thought that a love like mine must, at the end—well, I was a fool! But I won’t be a fool any more! I’m sorry for you, of course—I’m fearfully, terribly sorry—but I go to India. Good-bye!

Margaret. Yes, Tony—yes—you are right! I deserve my punishment, Tony! You *shall* go, and I won’t say another word. [*She runs to the door and calls “Lucy, Lucy!”* *Mrs. PETHICK comes in.*] Lucy, say good-bye to Captain Erquen.

Mrs. Pethick. But we shall see him to-morrow—he doesn't sail till——

Margaret. No, no—we'll say good-bye now. [*She turns to him.*] Dear, loyal, true-hearted friend, God bless you, and may you be happy always—and in my heart only the deepest love for you—not only gratitude, but honest, sincerest love—and prayers for you, prayers that you may meet the woman who is worthy of you, and who shall make you forget all *I* have made you suffer. Good-bye, Tony—good-bye!

[*She holds out both her hands to him—he looks at her—then suddenly shrugs his shoulders, slowly unfastens his key-chain and hands it to her.*

Tony. [*Surlily.*] Here.

Margaret. [*As she takes it, wondering.*] What is this for?

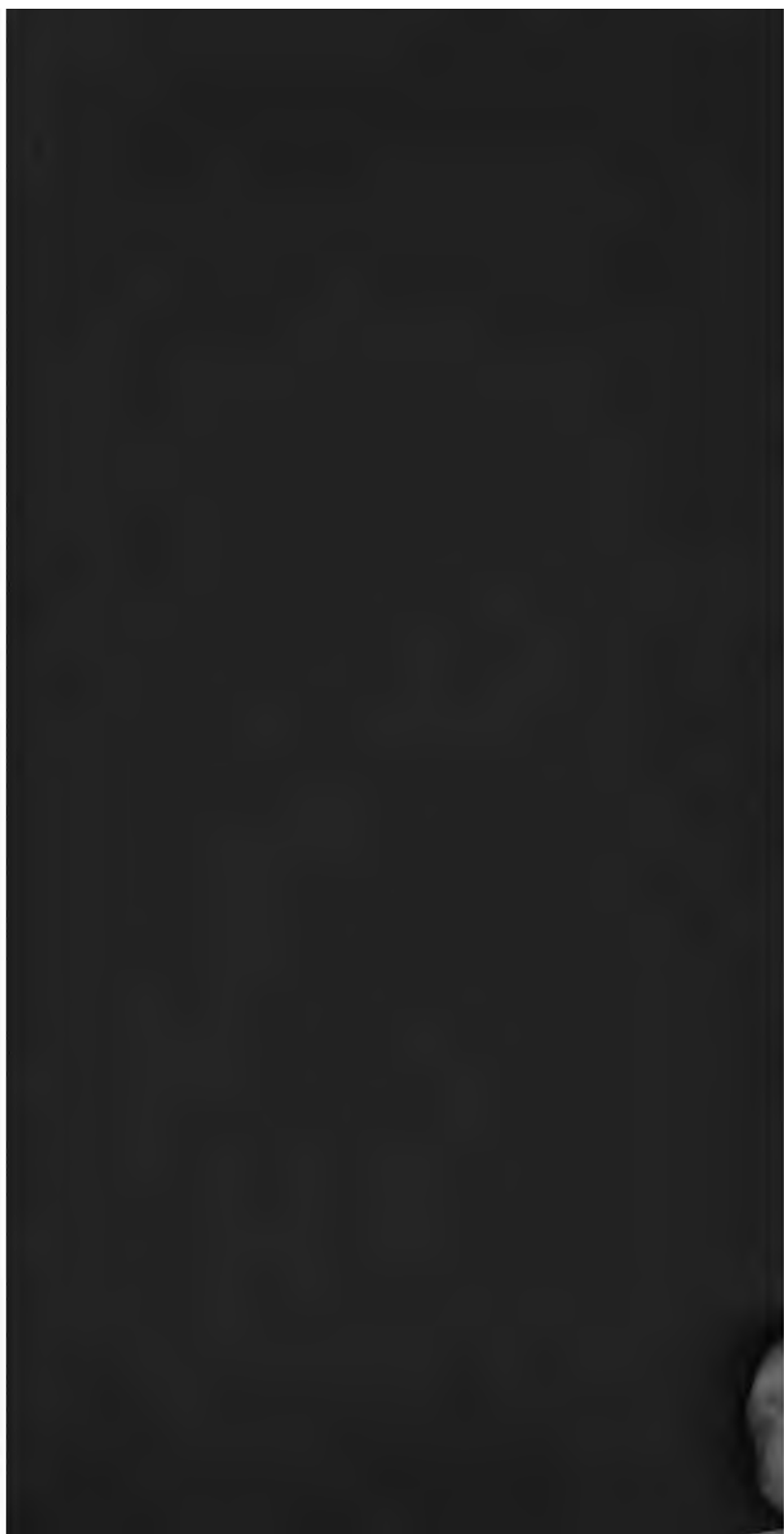
Tony. The chain that fastens on to my collar.

Margaret. Tony!

Tony. [*Throwing his hat into a corner and himself into a chair.*] I won't go to India—I'll stay. I'll be a damned fool to the finish.

Margaret. [*With shining eyes.*] I accept the chain, Tony . . . Here, Lucy, lock it away . . . [*She goes to TONY and rests a hand on his chair.*] Some day . . . he shall have it back. . . .

CURTAIN.







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